

# COLLEGE ENGLISH

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# COLLEGE ENGLISH

Volume 14

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Number 8

## *Realism and Neorealism in Contemporary Italian Literature*

NICOLA CHIAROMONTE<sup>1</sup>

**I**MMEDIATELY after the war Italian narrative literature attracted the attention of the reading public abroad, and more especially of the American public, to the point of competing successfully with current French literary production. A similar phenomenon had not occurred since the days of D'Annunzio, and, in fact, it took even the Italians by surprise. To the name of Silone, already famous all over the world but almost unknown in Italy, where his books had been banned, those of Moravia, Levi, Vittorini, and others were added, giving Italian literature a new prestige. At the same time, a remarkable series of motion pictures and a peculiarly Italian style of movie-making based on adherence to the humblest details of everyday life made the Italian scene familiar to movie audiences everywhere. The term "neorealism," coined in Italy to designate the new school of movie directors, was used abroad to designate the new school of narrators as well. Used in this fashion, the term was misleading: it seemed to imply either that the Itali-

ans had created a new kind of realism or that they had at last discovered the century-old tradition of narrative realism. Both notions were, as it happens, false. Realism, in Italy, was nothing new. At the same time, for reasons peculiar to the development of Italian culture and society, the new realistic trend had the freshness of discovery. To make this clear, a few remarks about realism in the Italian literary tradition are necessary before examining some of the most representative narrators of present-day Italy.

It is a commonplace in Italy as well as abroad that in practical life the Italians are apt to be clever and even cunning. A sharp vision of the apparent structure of natural objects and of man's motives is also quite generally recognized to be a characteristic of Italian art. The Italian mind is not easily carried away by mere fancy, metaphysical yearnings, or the rigorous course of pure reason. On the face of it, it is legitimate to say that the Italians are realists. Even Italian folk tales are marked by realism and horse sense rather than by the dreamlike qualities which characterize German folklore, for example. For all its fantastic charac-

<sup>1</sup> An Italian journalist, now living in Paris; literary correspondent for several American magazines and newspapers.

ters and adventures, that classical children's story, *Pinocchio*, is a thoroughly naturalistic tale, told in the language of down-to-earth common sense; its fantasy resembles Aesop's rather than Grimm's or Andersen's.

Yet, if the Italians are realists, their realism is not without paradoxes and even contradictions. Gaetano Salvemini, the liberal historian, once said that, for an Italian, two and two may be three, that it may also be five, but that it will never be four. What Salvemini meant was that, when it comes to facing the basic facts of communal and political life, an Italian finds it all but impossible to remain on the grounds of empiricism and exact reckoning; he will either see things blacker than they are and sink into apathy or else be led away by mythical yearnings into reckless adventure. For all his realism, Salvemini implied, the Italian cannot stand the bare arithmetic of facts.

Salvemini's paradox applies not only to Italian politics but, in some measure, to Italian literature as well. Dante's sense of the concrete was stupendous, yet he is also the greatest visionary in the history of Western literature. According to the textbooks, realism in Europe, as opposed to medieval mysticism and scholasticism, was born with Boccaccio, whose descriptions of fourteenth-century Tuscan life and manners are indeed sharp and pointed enough to fit the current notion of realism. Yet the truth of the matter is that Boccaccio is called a "realist" chiefly because religious piety has no place in his stories; his view of things, however, is that of an extremely sophisticated humanist. On the other hand, from the twelfth century to Giotto and Masaccio, Italian religious art is profoundly realistic in its approach but sure-

ly not in the image of the world that inspires it.

This leads to the suggestion that, while realism is certainly a constant trend, in the Italian tradition it is nevertheless rarely disjoined from imagination and from the attempt to relate the perception of sensuous reality to a view of the world as a whole and of its possible order. Speaking very generally, however, a fundamental change from and a real break with "realism" occurred during the Renaissance from Petrarch on; the "man of letters" was born for whom the term of reference was no longer reality but literature itself: formal perfection as exemplified by the classic models. With a few outstanding exceptions, the divorce lasted for centuries. Realism did not reassert itself before the Romantic Age.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the Fascist period most Italian writers found it expedient to fall back into the age-old tradition of "pure literature." The emphasis, once again, was on style. A strict avoidance of realistic crudeness and matter-of-fact details was recommended. Nevertheless, what is today called Italian realism (or neorealism) was born precisely in those years and in reaction to the emptiness of the official ideology as well as to the strictures of state-controlled writing. Those writers were confronted by a problem which was both literary and moral. In terms of literature, they had to look for a way out of preciousness and a "purity" of form which was too often synonymous with emptiness. Morally speaking, theirs was a problem of responsibility: Could the writer remain aloof from his surroundings, unmoved by a world in turmoil, unaffected by the crisis of all social and moral values? If not, then those facts

<sup>2</sup> The father of modern Italian realism—in fact, of the modern Italian novel—was Alessandro Manzoni, the author of *The Betrothed* (1827).

could hardly be coped with simply by literary sophistication and the cult of personal moods. The breakdown of political, social, and moral structures, of which fascism was both the product and the cause, forced that traditional egotist—the Italian man of letters—to face the responsibility of choice. Officially fascism did not prescribe any literary formula or support any specific school. In fact, it pretended to be “heroic,” “Machiavellian,” and “spiritualistic.” In one respect, however, the official line never varied: the Italians had to be optimistic and see only the “positive” and uplifting aspects of life and of society around them. Not only sadness but eventually any manner of thoughtfulness were suspect. Newspapers were forbidden to publish news about murders, suicides, adultery, vice, and other “negative” occurrences, and the writers were told in so many words that any description of the “lower depths” of Italian society—in fact, anything that was not shiny, joyful, or promising—would be considered a sneaking attack against the regime. On the other hand, any sustained interest in things foreign was in itself suspicious.

Opposition to this state of affairs among literary people naturally took the form of literary cosmopolitanism and an increasing interest in foreign literatures. This trend was, as a matter of fact, shared by the public at large—since three-quarters of the books published in Italy in those years were translations. American novels and short stories were particularly popular, and this for a very good reason: to the Italians, American fiction of the twenties and thirties seemed the bluntest reflection of the modern world. To the young Italian writers, or would-be writers, of that period, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Sherwood Anderson, and William Faulkner brought the

news that refuted most radically the false and provincial view of the world that fascism was trying to impose.

The birth date of contemporary Italian realism can be easily placed. It is 1929, the year when Alberto Moravia's first novel, *The Indifferent*, was published at the author's expense. A few months later *Fontamara*, a novel by a political exile whose pen name was Ignazio Silone, came out in Switzerland in a semiclandestine edition a few copies of which found their way into Italy.

Moravia's works are by now well known in this country.<sup>3</sup> His first and important novel, however, has been comparatively neglected. A first English edition of *The Indifferent*, published in the early thirties, was poorly received, partly on account of the shortcomings of the translation. But a new translation of the book has recently been done and will be out soon.

*The Indifferent* is a novel by a “prodigy child.” Moravia completed it when he was barely twenty. The plot is very simple, and it all develops in the space of twenty-four hours. An adolescent watches intently what is going on in his bourgeois family: his aging mother is clinging desperately to her bored lover, a cynical, smart man of the world; the lover is about to seduce the hero's young sister; empty conversations, interspersed with mutual resentment and irritation, cover all this with an atmosphere of ugly meaninglessness. The young man is revolted by what he sees and hears and yet paralyzed by his very revolt. He understands perfectly well the moral principles on which he should react and judge, but he is, at the same time, unable to really

<sup>3</sup> *The Woman of Rome*, *Two Adolescents*, *Conjugal Love*, and *The Conformist* have been published by Farrar, Straus & Young, which is also publishing the new translation of *The Indifferent*.

feel that a particular judgment is preferable to aimless staring or that a particular course of action can achieve more than plain inertia. His mood, he feels, is neither caused by the situation in his family nor directed against it; it concerns life itself and the world as a whole. His very passiveness, however, fills him with disgust, and disgust pushes him to sudden action; he will kill the intruder. He gets a gun, goes to see the man, and shoots at him. But, symbolically enough, he had failed to load the gun. After this incident, tragic resolution having been proved empty, the bourgeois routine of life goes on as before.

The critics praised *The Indifferent* very highly, greeting Moravia as a mature and original writer. The book had a circulation of eight thousand copies, a thousand more than D'Annunzio's *Pleasure*. In terms of the Italian book market, this was a great success indeed. But the literary milieu as a whole remained rather cold. Moravia had broken all the rules of "ivory-tower" literature; he was going back to nineteenth-century realism; his style lacked polish and was full of vulgar colloquialisms and even grammatical heresies. He was a clever young man but not a "man of letters." Concurrently with the "literati," Fascist circles did not lose any time in sensing that, if the official image of a happy and energetic Italy had to be maintained, Moravia was both a disgrace and a menace to the prestige of the regime. From then on Italy's most talented young writer was regarded with inflexible suspicion by the authorities. Not even totalitarian censorship, however, could stop the literary movement started by Moravia.

The hero of *The Indifferent* wanted at all cost to escape from his aimlessness into a definite action that would prove both that his passions were authentic and

that the outside world had meaning for him. It could be said that novel-writing has a similar function for Moravia himself. Not only has he written novels, but he has from the very beginning of his career affirmed the necessity of using the narrative form—the necessity, that is, of translating moods that would otherwise remain vaguely lyrical into the exacting language of action, dialogue, and psychological situations. The main themes of Moravia's work are probably three; the first, indifference, may well be the crucial one. The deep moralistic streak that runs through all of Moravia's work is, in fact, a recurrent attempt to transcend the moral nihilism of present society, of which he is profoundly aware. The second theme is adolescence. The critics seem to agree that this is Moravia's strong point. Two of his novelettes, brought out here in one volume, *Two Adolescents*, are certainly in the first rank of his achievements. Moravia's adolescents are not only unhappy; they represent the quintessence of what can be clumsy, abortive, and shattering in a young man's first attempt to come to grips with the world. Psychologically, one could even interpret Moravia's peculiar universe as surging from the shock of a first wrong contact with life. Throughout Moravia's fiction, in fact, life appears as an irreparable "comedy of errors." Of this, there is no better example than his latest novel, *The Conformist*, where the hero's initial equivocation (he thought that he had murdered a man) makes of his entire life an attempt to escape what he supposes to be his own perverse nature. Escaping from "dreadful freedom" into the staunchest possible kind of conformism, he becomes an agent of the Fascist secret police, and this, in the end, leads him precisely to treachery and murder.



Finally, sensuality is a steady theme with Moravia. It should more accurately be called lasciviousness, since there is nothing pagan or joyful about Moravia's lust. Desire and flesh are simply the only certitudes of his characters; the rest, especially moral values, is fundamentally unreal to them. But, then, exactly because herein lies their only truth, sexual pleasure leads them neither to joy nor to clarity. In fact, it can be accepted as "natural" and almost redeem itself only in a creature of flesh and elemental feelings like the prostitute of *The Woman of Rome*.

Moravia's realism, and even "materialism," which has brought upon his works the condemnation of the Catholic church, is ultimately based on moral wondering and anguish. This is what makes his stories so significant and "modern."

It would be hard to imagine a writer more different from Moravia than Ignazio Silone. Compared to him, Moravia looks almost like an "ivory-tower" writer. Silone is the only one among contemporary Italian novelists who has been personally involved in the great ideological strifes of our time and who has made of these the theme of his fiction. If "socialist realism" were not an ambiguous propaganda slogan, Silone would be the only contemporary writer to whom the formula could be applied.

Silone was a Communist until 1929, occupying an important position in the International. In 1929 he broke with the party over the issue of absolute obedience to Moscow and went to live in Switzerland. There one day an emissary of the party came to visit him in order to persuade him to make his apology and beg for readmission. To make things easy and quick, the man submitted a written document to Silone containing the list of

"errors" to which he was supposed to confess. Having read it, Silone said: "I don't believe a word of this. I can't sign." To which the answer was: "If you believed in this, what would be the point of asking you to sign it?"

This exchange could be taken as the starting point of Silone's career as a novelist. The truth he could not assert as a political man he would from then on express in the form of written apologies. Forced as he was into inaction, he would not waste time in arguing ideological points and fighting the battles of sects and splinter groups. He would just describe the life of the people whose needs ideologies and party tactics claimed to express and satisfy. He would give realistic examples of both and let the contrast between truth and Machiavellian scheming manifest itself.

Silone's first novel, *Fontamara*,<sup>4</sup> was about fascism, not communism. It was the story of village peasants driven to unemployment and misery by the despotism of the big landowner, who forbids them to use the water of a brook which could quench the thirst of their arid plots. Government power is, of course, behind the landowner. The peasants who go to the big city to look for jobs are put in jail as subversives. Fascism is never mentioned in the book, and the meaning of the silence is double. On the one hand, Silone refuses to be polemical; he just wants to describe. On the other hand, fascism for him, as well as for his peasants, is nothing new, just another government, another way of ignoring reality through bureaucracy and big words. Socialism and communism are not mentioned either; ideological questions mean nothing at all to those poor people if they don't mean actual relief from injustice.

<sup>4</sup> English translation published by Harper & Brothers.

In *Bread and Wine* (1936) Silone raised the question of the relation between the party, with its dogmas and "lines," and peasant life. Pietro Spina, an already wavering underground Communist, travels through his native countryside hiding his true identity under a priest's frock. At every encounter with real people and their problems, the contrast between theories and political calculations, on one side, and living society, on the other, becomes more evident. There is never any open discussion of the issue, however—only the irony of plain confrontation. The essence of Silone's realism, already present in the form of a bitter sense of the grotesque in *Fontamara*, is fully revealed in *Bread and Wine*. The reader is, in fact, inevitably reminded of another famous journey through real society: Gogol's *Dead Souls*, with its powerful mixture of irony and anguish. When Pietro Spina's journey is over, dogmas and tactical cunning have vanished without leaving a trace. What the lonely hero has learned is that there is very little left among his people that can offer a ground for hope except the Christian tradition so deeply rooted in the hearts of the humble. The symbol of this is Don Benedetto, a rather unorthodox old country priest for whom Christianity, the need for justice, and the hope that the reign of force will some day cease are indissoluble tenets of the same faith. In *The Seed beneath the Snow* (1942) Silone tried to give an even simpler symbol of his hope, expressing it in the figure of the dumb peasant and his donkey, the only creatures in which the still-wandering Pietro Spina, hunted by the police, can put his trust.

Silone's real symbol, however, is neither Christian tradition nor the simplicity and purity of the inarticulate: It is the peasant community itself. Silone does not have any particular admiration for

the peasant world which is the subject and, one might say, the main character of all his novels. He knows very well that the primitive life of his mountain peasants and village dwellers cannot be given as an example of what the world at large should become. What fascinates him in those people is the permanence of their way of life, of their customs, of their morality. They are not endowed with virtues superior to those of the city dwellers, but they have endured and remained entirely themselves through the ages. Poor, ignorant, abandoned as they are, they have unwittingly preserved the sense of what is permanent, nay, eternal, in life, that which should not be given up for abstractions. The truth of the peasants is rustic and inarticulate. But they remain, and all else changes. They are composed of necessity; all else, of doubt, chance, and cunning.

Here lies the root of Silone's "realism" as well as of his "socialism." Silone is a realist because of the deliberate simplicity of his narration and the plainness of his style—a plainness which, at times, makes the sophisticated reader feel uncomfortable, as though the author were not really addressing him but an invisible audience of poor laborers and village people. This is, in fact, the audience Silone the socialist has in mind. His socialism stems from his recollection of the intricate reality of peasant life, where justice is not an abstract idea but a daily need like "bread and wine"; and, like bread and wine, it is to be obtained through personal toil rather than through the complicated workings of a bureaucratic machinery.

Silone's latest novel, *A Handful of Blackberries*, whose English translation will be published shortly, centers on a forest which more than a century ago belonged to a peasant community but



which through trickery came into the possession of the Tarocchi, a powerful local family. The peasants have never forgotten this and have always evaluated the political changes that have occurred by what happened to the woodland. Nothing happened to the woodland for a hundred years; it remained securely in the hands of the Tarocchi. Political changes, including the fall of fascism, have meant nothing to the people. Thus, the peasants did not deem it necessary to honor this event by bringing out of hiding the trumpet which before fascism they used for summoning the village to collective discussions and action. Under fascism, when the laborers' union was disbanded, the trumpet had been carefully concealed. Now the Communists want this symbolic instrument, declaring themselves its legitimate inheritors. But how can their claim be recognized as legitimate, since they have deemed it expedient to come to terms with the Tarocchi family? Therefore, after having reappeared for a brief moment during a popular tumult, the trumpet is once more placed in hiding. To this essential and typical theme, Silone has added a description of the customs and tactics of the Communist party in post-Fascist Italy. This he has done through the story of the clash between two party members and the official "line." The clash that truly interests Silone, however, is not the one between the party and the heretics but rather between the senseless artifices of the political machinery and the incorruptible simplicity of the people themselves.

One might wonder whether Carlo Levi's very successful *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (1946)<sup>5</sup> would have been written at all if Silone's novels had not attracted the attention of the anti-Fascist intellectuals

to the problems of the forgotten people of southern Italy. In any case, Carlo Levi completely shares Silone's view that the problem of southern misery puts in question not only Fascist methods but the very structure of the Italian centralized state and could not be solved either by going back to pre-Fascist liberalism or by a wholesale application of the Marxist panacea.

Carlo Levi is a medical doctor, a painter, a writer, and a very sophisticated intellectual. This already suggests the peculiar quality of his realism. Levi is a realist, one might say, in so far as the artist in him sees man and his surroundings with the clinical eye of the man of science, while the man of science is endowed with the vision of the poet and of the humanist. *Christ Stopped at Eboli* is first of all a faithful account of what the author saw and understood during the months he spent in one of the most derelict regions of Italy, Lucania, where the Fascist police had confined him on account of his oppositional activities. The final result is the discovery that those backward populations have a culture of their own, based on immemorial traditions and an equally immemorial poverty. This culture is what Carlo Levi sets out to describe in its everyday context with the care of an anthropologist and the creative sympathy of an artist. No sociological or economic survey, and no political essay, however brilliant, could have made people in Italy and abroad more keenly aware of the problems of Lucania than this diary rich in portraits, anecdotes, sketches, and incidental essays. The reader of *Christ Stopped at Eboli* has no difficulty in accepting the author's contention that his Lucanians have been constantly by-passed by history. No social undertaking can have real meaning if it leaves these peasants untouched. Thus,

<sup>5</sup> Published by Farrar, Straus & Young.

Levi's realism is, in more than one way, *political* realism as well.

In Carlo Levi's next book, *The Watch* (1950), the author's political mythology is defined in a clear-cut dichotomy. The opposite species of Italians are two, Levi says: the *contadini* (the Italian word for peasants), who are not only the primitives of his first book but "all men who make things, create them, and are content with them"; and the *Luigini* (from the name of Don Luigini, the mayor of the village described in *Christ Stopped at Eboli*), who are the bureaucratic mob: employees of the state and the banks, the military, the magistrates, the lawyers, the police," and such unproductive go-betweens.

As far as structure goes, *The Watch* is a very loose book. It is a string of reminiscences of the period following Italy's liberation—the years of the great disenchantment. The social disorder that followed the last war in Italy is not without redeeming features, in Levi's eyes. The best chapters of the book are two. One describes in a melancholic vein the dismissal of Premier Ferruccio Parrisi, the leader of the Resistance movement, under the pressure of the Christian Democrats on one side and the Communists on the other. This was obviously, in Carlo Levi's mind, a victory of the *Luigini*. The other excellent chapter describes the irrepressible zest for life of the Neapolitan populace, their resourcefulness, their humor, their resilience against all odds. The *contadini*, one is forced to conclude, are pretty much alive.

With Elio Vittorini we come to a very literary kind of realism. In *Sicily* (1941) appeared in this country a decade after its Italian publication, with a preface by Ernest Hemingway. The style of the book reflected a strong influence of Hemingway's writing: slang expressions, stac-

cato dialogue, and a narration resting exclusively on significant gesture or act. The hero, a young Sicilian living in Milan, goes back to his native town for a visit to his mother; his is a journey back to the stark realities of life in a destitute little town. No reader could escape noticing that Vittorini's book implied a rejection of the Fascist outlook no less radical than Siione's or Levi's. In the books he wrote after the war, Vittorini's antifascism became explicit and, in fact, took a leftist turn. In *Men and Not* (1946)<sup>6</sup> the imitation of Hemingway becomes haunting. An episode of the Resistance struggle in Milan is narrated with a syncopated technique, in a series of frantic dialogues, occasionally interrupted by flashbacks of the stream-of-consciousness type. Vittorini's latest novel, *The Women of Messina* (1949), a story about the hardships of Sicilian women falling back on their village after a long odyssey through Italy, insists on similar experimental devices. Vittorini seems to feel that narrative realism depends on the discovery of an appropriate up-to-date style. This justifies the suspicion that in this writer we meet the old Italian man of letters in reverse: the style must at all costs be broken; the dialogue can bear no syntax; the plot must never unfold along regular lines; and passions can never be allowed to appear below their highest pitch.

Of Vasco Pratolini, the author of the successful *A Tale of Poor Lovers* (1947),<sup>7</sup> it must be said at once that he is a Tuscan and a storyteller in the Tuscan tradition. This tradition has not dried up since the happy times of Boccaccio. In the last century, however, it was tinged with a vein of resigned sentimentality. *A Tale of Poor Lovers* is the chronicle of a street in

<sup>6</sup> Published by New Directions.

<sup>7</sup> Published by Viking.

the slum section of Florence, a story of sad adolescences, daily hardships, and short-lived hopes. The plot is thin, but the atmosphere is firm. Pratolini is convincing as long as he avoids drawing conclusions, organizing events, or passing judgment on them. His are series of skilful and delicate sketches rather than full-fledged novels. In *A Hero of Our Time* (1949) Pratolini has tried to write a completely political novel by giving us the type of the young "neo-Fascist." The portrait remains unconvincing in so far as it is based on the moralistic assumption that those who are corrupt and naïve, and therefore cannot be socialist, are Fascist instead. As of today, Pratolini is at his best in his novelettes, of which a good example is *The Girls of San Frediano*, published recently by the international magazine *Botteghe Oscure*.

What is usually meant by "neorealism" when this term is applied both to literary fiction and to a certain kind of motion pictures is a more or less skilful mixture of straight reportage and humanitarian feelings. Of this tendency, Giuseppe Berto is a good representative. Berto's best novel, *The Sky Is Red* (1947),<sup>8</sup> is about life in a northern Italian town during the period following the collapse of fascism and the liberation. Its author, however, conceived it and wrote it in an American prison camp in Texas; his painstaking description of Italy in that period is in fact an imaginary reportage or at least an extrapolation of previous experience. The heroes of this

novel are adolescents caught in the storms of war and disorder. Times are hard and dangerous, and there is no way to be "choosy": prostitution, theft, murder, are everyday occurrences. The gist of the novel is the young people's tolerance of evil and their pity for suffering and their aspiration to moral order. It is doubtful that this aspiration rises above the kind of starry-eyed idealism so widespread in Italy after the war and which fell such an easy prey to Communist indoctrination. In Giuseppe Berto's second novel, *The Brigand* (1951)<sup>9</sup> (*The Works of God*, published prior to it, is a novellette of little significance), this idealism becomes extreme. The hero is a veteran who, compelled by social and political circumstances to become a sort of outlaw, finds moral redemption in assigning to his actions a "progressive" meaning. Here, a certain felicity of description is marred by the rosy falseness of the general conception.

These are the foremost among the narrators of the younger generation who, after the Fascist eclipse, have again attracted the attention of the outside world to Italian literature.<sup>10</sup> The earnestness of their effort and the persistence of the trend allow the observer to predict that "realism," the will to express the human condition in the simple language of the everyday, is much more than a literary fashion in contemporary Italy.

<sup>8</sup> Published by Prentice-Hall.

<sup>10</sup> Two young writers of originality whose works have recently appeared and who are not realists are Elsa Morante (*A House of Liars* [1948]) and Italo Calvino (*The Viscount Cut in Two* [1952]).

<sup>9</sup> Published by New Directions.

## Stephen Vincent Benét

ELEANOR M. SICKELS<sup>1</sup>

LATE in 1941 William Rose Benét wrote that his younger brother, Stephen Vincent, was "by way of becoming an American institution."<sup>2</sup> A chief reason for William Rose Benét's remark was the extraordinary number of prizes and honors awarded to his brother. But an even more important factor is that he spoke continually to what Gilbert Seldes has called "the great audience." Almost all his short stories, from potboilers to masterpieces, appeared in mass-circulation magazines, most of the best in the *Saturday Evening Post*. The book sales of the long narrative poems have been phenomenal for poetry (the first edition of *John Brown's Body* sold 100,000 copies), and most of the important Benét items are still in print. "The Devil and Daniel Webster" was made into a successful moving picture (*All That Money Can Buy*, 1941). The opera made from this story by Benét and Douglas Moore, as well as their dramatization of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (*The Headless Horseman*, 1937), originally written for a Bronxville high school, has been on the air, as have most if not all of the numerous musical settings of Benét poems. To this most important of all mass media, radio (there being then no question of television), Benét's contribution was very great. It began in 1928, when

WEAF broadcast passages from *John Brown's Body* on the day of publication. Throughout the thirties and forties there were many readings of the poems and dramatizations of the short stories, often repeated again and again. In 1936 Benét was persuaded to take part in an "American School of the Air" program (C.B.S.), and thenceforth he was increasingly involved in writing directly for radio. As the Nazi menace and then the war crisis deepened, he wrote and helped produce script after script, written "with anger and passion"<sup>3</sup>—and, judged by both professional and audience reaction, his work was extraordinarily effective. In testimony to his great contribution, WEAF mounted, shortly after his death, a memorial program involving many who had taken part in Benét broadcasts—written by Deems Taylor, spoken by Helen Hayes and Raymond Massey, among others, and sponsored by the Council for Democracy. Currently, a decade after Benét's death, *John Brown's Body*, arranged by Charles Laughton in what might be described as concert form, and acted by Tyrone Power, Judith Anderson, Raymond Massey, a chorus, and dancers, is playing to full houses on Broadway.

The great audience to which Benét thus appealed was primarily an American audience, and the appeal was made through profoundly American qualities

<sup>1</sup> Queens College.

<sup>2</sup> "My Brother Steve," *Saturday Review of Literature*, XXIV (November 15, 1941), 4; reprinted in a memorial pamphlet, *Stephen Vincent Benét* (New York: SRL and Farrar & Rinehart, 1943); also, condensed, in *SRL* for March 27, 1943, and as a foreword to *Twenty-five Short Stories of Stephen Vincent Benét* (Garden City, N.Y.: Sun Dial Press, 1943).

<sup>3</sup> Norman Rosten in the Foreword to *We Stand United* (Farrar & Rinehart, 1945), p. vi. This volume contains all Benét's original radio scripts. The title piece was not written for radio but was broadcast when read by Raymond Massey at an America United rally on the day after the 1940 election.



in Benét's thinking. Of these, not the least American was his emphasis on unity in diversity. Benét's ancestors came from Florida, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania; he was educated in Georgia, California, and New England and lived at one time or another also in upstate New York, Rhode Island, New York City, and rural Connecticut. He knew and loved America, North and South, East and West, city and country. He wrote of the "beauty, rapid and harsh," of Manhattan towers ("Notes To Be Left in a Cornerstone") and of "the red earth . . . the three-cropped ground" ("The Island and the Fire"). As coeditor (1940-43) with Carl Carmer of the "Rivers of America" series, he sponsored books on sixteen American rivers. He understood, too, the mixed racial composition of our people and dwelt proudly on it, especially in his radio scripts:

Adamoffsky, Adams, Anderson, Bailey,  
Bratillo, Brown . . .<sup>4</sup>

runs (for example) the polyglot roll call which punctuates one of the letters to *Dear Adolf*. His stories and poems make vivid the unity in diversity of our history. Every period is covered and nearly every phase: the first settlers (*Western Star*), pirates (the thumping ballad of "The Hemp"), Indians (the short stories "Jacob and the Indians" and "The Captive," the opening poem in *A Book of Americans*), witchcraft (the story of "The Minister's Books," an essay on the Salem witch trials), the Revolution (the short story "A Tooth for Paul Revere"), the Civil War (*John Brown's Body*), the frontier (the spirited ballads of "William Sycamore," "The Mountain Whippoorwill," and "Daniel Boone"), the vigorous young nation ("Johnny Pye and the Fool Killer," "O'Halloran's Luck," and "The Devil and Daniel Webster," all among

the most famous of Benét's short stories), and the Gilded Age (*James Shore's Daughter*, his last, best, and neglected novel). And he makes it all of a piece, past, present, and future interpenetrating: "It is something beginning to live," says the old Jewish sage in "Jacob and the Indians"; "she had nations in her eyes," says the narrator in "The Captives" of the young pioneer starting for Kentucky.<sup>5</sup>

This is only a sampling of the Benét works which illustrate the theme of unity in diversity. All the historical poems and stories mentioned, with the probable exception of "A Tooth for Paul Revere," are among Benét's best. But especially notable in this connection, of course, are his two great near-epics, *John Brown's Body* and *Western Star*. Critics agree that these poems are not true epics, chiefly because neither is centered on a single cultural hero like Beowulf or Odysseus. But they have the sweep and cultural symbolism of the epic (though *Western Star* is but a magnificent fragment), and the interweaving of many diverse stories to gain an effect different from and greater than any one of them is itself evidence of the great cultural fact of unity in diversity. North and South, powerful and humble, are treated in both poems with democratic equity. Not only does *John Brown's Body* have a hero in blue and a hero in gray, but we are given the historical leaders of both sides (note especially the subtle portrait of Lincoln) and minor fictional characters from many walks of life, including the slave Cudjo, one of the most interesting figures in the story. So sympathetically are the cultures of both North and South depicted that Benét

<sup>5</sup> *Selected Works* (2 vols.; Farrar & Rinehart, 1942), II, 9; *The Last Circle* (Farrar, Straus & Co., 1946), p. 47. These three volumes contain in easily available form all Benét's best stories and poems except *Western Star*. Most of the items are included also in *The Pocket Book of Stephen Vincent Benét*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

came to be regarded as a symbol of reunion; in 1933, at the University of Georgia, he read a poem at the unveiling of a portrait of his grandfather, General Stephen Vincent Benét of the *Union Army*—"a new note of color," as the *Atlanta Journal* put it, "the blending of blue and gray."<sup>6</sup> Through both long narratives the sense of destiny which binds together past, present, and future blows like a great wind:

There was a wind over England, and it blew  
—and men followed the Western Star. As  
for John Brown:

Out of his body grows revolving steel . . .<sup>7</sup>  
—and the Machine Age is upon us.

Profoundly American, also, is Benét's belief in the future. He saw it as growing out of the past and present but subject to man's will. He was continually drawing parallels between past and present, usually with intent to mold the future. The famous "nightmares" begin with warnings against the menace of the machine civilization foreseen at the close of *John Brown's Body*: the symbolical termites gnaw at the steel foundations of New York (1933); the mechanistic angel scatters the seeds that cause green vines to wither and the "smoke of the armies" to arise (1935); the machines run berserk and hunt down mankind (1935). By the late 1930's the smoke of the armies overhangs the world: "Nightmare for Future Reference" (1938) is about the *third* World War, and "Nightmare at Noon" (1940) foresees bombers over New York.<sup>8</sup> The boy reporter in "William Riley and

the Fates" (just before Pearl Harbor), straying into a convention of American "destinies" in which all periods of the past jostle elbows, sees vague pictures of coming war and is inspired to be worthy of the American past. In the nazified Fourth of July parade of *Listen to the People* and the nazified schoolroom of *They Burned the Books* (both wartime radio scripts) there are vivid pictures of what could happen if we proved unworthy of this heritage. Even if these nightmare visions should come true, men "must build again": that is the message of the haunting fantasy "By the Waters of Babylon" (1937), in which a lad from a barbaric mid-American tribe discovers remnants of our culture in the ruins of New York.

A third profoundly American element in Benét's thinking was his steady belief in the values traditionally cherished by Americans, but without sentimental illusions. For, as Benét himself points out, "Two moods have been in the mind of America from the first"—the moods of "enthusiasm and self-criticism." He defends the writers of the "lost generation" (among whom he counts himself), saying that they "wanted to clear the ground, and clear it of bunk and cant," yet now—he was writing a few months before Pearl Harbor—those who may still freely use the "power of the written word" must soberly being "thinking certain things through."<sup>9</sup> By this time positive thinking about America was again becoming fashionable. But, as several reviewers of his later volumes pointed out, Benét himself had never been among MacLeish's "irresponsibles": he had held steadily to his belief in human dignity and in democratic values.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in *Literary Digest*, CXVI (July 8, 1933), 26.

<sup>7</sup> *Western Star* (Farrar & Rinehart, 1943), p. 17; *John Brown's Body*, in *Selected Works*, I, 335.

<sup>8</sup> "Metropolitan Nightmare," "Nightmare with Angels," "Nightmare Number Three," "Nightmare for Future Reference," "Nightmare at Noon," *ibid.*, Vol. I. The first four appeared originally in the *New Yorker*; the last in the *New York Times Magazine*.

<sup>9</sup> "The Power of the Written Word," *Summons to the Free* (Farrar & Rinehart, 1941), pp. 8-9 *passim*; originally published in *Yale Review*, XXX (new ser.; spring, 1951), 522 ff.



The more esoteric critics have looked askance at this writer who actually believes in democracy, romantic love, family responsibility, and the innate decency of a large segment of humanity. And, indeed, one who has read at all widely in the uncollected short stories must admit that most of them are too pat, too morally innocent, too pointed to a happy ending, to qualify fully as art—

And so much bad work for bread,  
The work that crawls in the hand  
And that I would do again. . . .<sup>10</sup>

A few of these inferior stories got into the collections; even in some of the best stories a sort of movie fade-out of young love mars the ending. But, as against these banalities, we have the same values asserted in the psychological subtlety of "Too Early Spring" or "No Visitors," the humorous insight of "Glamour," the delicate balance between the calls of adventure and of home in "The Danger of Shadows"—not to mention the charming love lyrics to Rosemary Benét in *Tiger Joy* and *Burning City* and the fine reflective poems in the latter volume asserting the triumph of the spirit. Benét shows us also the bitterness of rejected values: the young people who get a divorce they don't really want just because it is expected of them ("Everybody Was Very Nice") or the unhappy man who fritters away his years at a bohemian bar, despising the respectable married happiness of his ex-fiancée ("A Life at Angelo's"). Indeed, Benét well knew his generation's agony of frustration:

Christ, have mercy upon us  
Freud, have mercy upon us  
Life, have mercy upon us.<sup>11</sup>

Social satire, though a more persistent strain in Benét than is generally realized,

occurs mostly in the early verses of *Young Adventure* (1918) and *Heavens and Earth* (1920) and the early novels, especially *Young People's Pride* (1922). There are touches of it in his mature work, notably in the account of congressmen watching the first Battle of Bull Run in *John Brown's Body* (1928). In the ominous thirties Benét, like most of his contemporaries, found satire swallowed up in horror and apprehension, distilled in the passionate intensity of *Burning City* (1936),<sup>12</sup> with its mechanistic "nightmares," its grief-stricken report on America in "Ode to Walt Whitman," its terrible indictment of fascism in "Ode to the Austrian Socialists" and "Litany for Dictatorships," its prophecies of war in "1936" and "Nightmare Number Three." But, intense as was his anti-fascism, Benét never confused either socialism or liberal capitalism with communism: when, after the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939, the prodigal intellectuals began returning to their ideological home, he was there to greet them.

Nor did he ever believe, as so many did between wars, that the great idea-words of American tradition—"freedom," "democracy"—were empty and outmoded, not worth fighting for. He never admitted that the devotion of the soldiers of the first World War was misplaced, and he was among the first to see in the anti-fascist struggle a cause even more worthy of devotion. Hence, as World War II approached, the implicit affirmation became explicit, and he laid aside *Western Star* to write radio scripts for the government and the Council of Democ-

<sup>12</sup> The entire contents of *Burning City*, except "Reply" (cited above), is reprinted in Vol. I of *Selected Works*, p. 364 and pp. 412-56. Of the earlier books of verse, the same volume contains a selection from *Young Adventure*, pp. 339-45 and four or five others; a few scattered poems from *Heavens and Earth*; much of *Tiger Joy* (1925), pp. 346-63, 368-86, and scattering; and several from *A Book of Americans* (1933), pp. 395-402.

<sup>10</sup> "Reply," *Burning City* (Farrar & Rinehart, 1936), p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> "Minor Litany," in *Selected Works*, I, 462.

racy and his short interpretive history, *America* (published posthumously), for the OWI. Harry Crandell of "The Prodigal Children," who is doing the same sort of radio work in World War II as his creator, recalls how "the fearsome tripe" written about World War I had "retched the bowels" of his generation and concludes that "they'll retch at me just the same way. But," he adds ruefully, "somebody had to do it."<sup>13</sup> Benét's death was doubtless hastened by his own strenuous doing of his share.

Nor was all his share "tripe." Consider the radio plays *They Burned the Books* and *A Child Was Born*. The first broadcast of *They Burned the Books*, given on the ninth anniversary of the infamous Nazi bonfire of May 10, 1933, was one of the climactic events in radio history. The script is a skilful interweaving, in the best radio-documentary technique, of the Narrator's voice, a Nazi Voice, the voices of many who are for or against us, the voices of Nazi teacher and children in an American schoolroom, bound together with music and building to a tremendous climax:

After the awful final denunciation sounding out in Arnold Moss's full voice, that crowd in the studio went quite mad. The orchestra applauded, backs were slapped, feet were stamped, everybody shook hands with everybody else. . . .<sup>14</sup>

This fiery and poetic script has been repeatedly printed, recited, rebroadcast. So has *A Child Was Born*, Benét's beautiful modern morality with contemporary implications. In these scripts Benét achieves the difficult synthesis of timely message and art.

Thus Benét came to be "an American institution." Speaking to a wide audience

<sup>13</sup> *The Last Circle*, p. 205.

<sup>14</sup> John Farrar, "'For the Record,'" in *Stephen Vincent Benét*, p. 32. This essay gives much interesting information about Benét's radio work.

and yet keeping the (grudging) respect of the critics, he had attained something very like what Archibald MacLeish has called "public speech." It remains to point out the most striking of the stylistic elements contributing to the popularity and the individual flavor of his best work.

First to come to mind are clarity and simplicity. In that age of the "cult of unintelligibility," the professional critics were, as Clifton Fadiman once remarked, "a little dismayed . . . that almost everything he wrote was easy to understand."<sup>15</sup> His verse narratives are in easy, colloquial rhythms; his lyrics sing and flow, with simple, fresh imagery, with delicacy and often humor. His short stories have beginning, middle, and end, and his symbolism is seldom hidden in indirection or esoteric allusion. His radio scripts are couched in a mixture of prose and verse at times indistinguishable one from the other but at other times moving into forceful and appropriate prose or rising into impassioned poetry. (Like MacLeish, he was early convinced of the special suitability of radio as a medium for poetry.) At worst, these qualities make for obviousness and mediocrity; at best, for an art which speaks for and to a whole culture.

Effective also is Benét's combination of realism and romance, especially in his studies of history. His was a highly romantic temperament, but, as he matured, he learned to stiffen romance with a realism enlivened with authentic detail and awake to human frailty; as has been justly remarked, his rediscovery of American history was not a rediscovery of Parson Weems.<sup>16</sup> The enormous

<sup>15</sup> "Stephen Vincent Benét" (review of *Western Star*), *New Yorker*, XIX (July 3, 1943), 61.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Wood Krutch, "Stephen V. Benét and the American Past" (review of *Selected Works*), *New York Herald-Tribune Books*, June 21, 1942, p. 1.

amount of research that went into *John Brown's Body* and *Western Star*, for example, issued in vivid details of daily life and thought, giving a mixed account of courage and cowardice, nobility and degradation. And if some critics, even so, thought these poems overromantic, it is well to remember that, as Benét himself wrote, "there is . . . a certain amount of romance involved in the settling of a new country."<sup>17</sup> At any rate, the eminent historian Henry Steele Commager has expressed the opinion that, because it tells the story in terms of the minds and hearts of the people, *John Brown's Body* is the best of all histories of the Civil War.<sup>18</sup>

To enter thus into the lives of their ancestors is to help interpret the people to themselves; ever better if the poet can also incarnate the folk spirit in figures seeming to come not so much from the imagination of a single man as from the myth-making of a people. Has any other American equaled Benét here? His best ballads and ballad-like poems have the authentic flavor of primitive America. Most of the best short stories have the quality of legend or myth. The most famous of them, "The Devil and Daniel Webster," has all but become an actual American legend.

The deceptive simplicity of ballad technique has its parallel in the straightforward and apparently naïve pattern of the prose morality and the folk tale. Johnny Pye's adventures with the Fool-killer, Jacob's with the Indians, Cue's with the terrors of escape from slavery ("Freedom's a Hard-bought Thing")—all move with the forthright progression,

the clear and almost impersonal simplicity, of folklore. Even the more sophisticated moralities somewhat in Hawthorne's manner, such as "The Minister's Books" or "The Bishop's Beggar" (one of the few with foreign background), have this quality of legend. "As It Was in the Beginning" is a myth of the far past; "By the Waters of Babylon," a myth of the future. The bound girl and the seven brothers in "The Sobbin' Women" might be out of a fairy tale; the best of the numerous uncollected stories told by the Oldest Inhabitant have a fairy-tale pattern. Like folk tales, too, Benét's stories pass casually in and out of ordinary reality, until it becomes difficult to remember whether there is a supernatural element in, say, "Jacob and the Indians" (there isn't) or "A Tooth for Paul Revere" (there is). It seems somehow natural for a popular orchestra conductor to turn out to be King of the Cats, for O'Halloran to find a leprecaun on the western prairie ("O'Halloran's Luck") or Barnum an angel in a Pennsylvania barn ("The Angel Was a Yankee"), or for Dan'l Webster to talk down the Devil.

So the legends and the supernatural happenings are no longer something out of a dim past in a distant land but something that could happen—maybe has happened?—right here at home. They express our lives, our thoughts, our fears and aspirations, our diverse types, our beautiful, sprawling land. Dan'l Webster takes on some of the qualities of Paul Bunyan: he sneezes so hard you can hear it across the state border in New Hampshire, he plays with a mile-long line a sea serpent huge as Leviathan, he moves with his oratory twelve of the greatest scamps in American history.<sup>19</sup> The

<sup>17</sup> Foreword to *Gauley Mountain*, by Louise McNeill (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1939), p. xiii.

<sup>18</sup> "The Flame of Stephen Vincent Benét's Spirit" (review of *Western Star*), *New York Herald-Tribune Weekly Book Review*, June 27, 1943, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> These incidents occur, respectively, in "Daniel Webster and the Ides of March," "Daniel Webster

American types, the American names, the American rhythms, the American tall-tale humor, all are there—and, above all, the belief, self-critical but profound, in democracy and the United States of America. In short, these folk tales "make it evident," in the words of Joseph Wood Krutch, "that Daniel Webster has as

much right as Dr. Faustus to hold converse with the devil."<sup>20</sup>

Not even in the cynical twenties, the bitterly partisan thirties, or the embattled early forties did Americans need more than today this sort of self-revelation, this sort of faith in themselves and their national idea.

and the Sea Serpent," and "The Devil and Daniel Webster." Of these three Daniel Webster stories (all of which appeared originally in the *Saturday Evening Post*), only the last is included in *Selected Works*. The others are amusing but scarcely to be mentioned in the same breath with Benét's masterpiece.

It's a long way out of the past and a long way forward.

It's a tough way too, and there's plenty of trouble in it.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> In his review of *Selected Works*, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> *Listen to the People*, in *We Stand United*, p. 151.

## Interpreting the Symbol

CHARLES CHILD WALCUTT<sup>1</sup>

WHEN I recently asked a distinguished classical scholar what his advice would be about how to teach symbolism, he replied with a single ringing word: "Don't."

The reply was, of course, facetious and appropriate to a waning August night, but it reflected an attitude as clearly as if it had been a three-hundred-word sentence. It implied, I suspect, that everybody teaches symbolism and nobody is sure about it; that some modern criticism has run symbolism into the ground; that the lunatic fringe of modern poets and prose writers had used what appear to be symbols as a means of achieving effects of profundity which are in fact only impressive façades—and often not even façades but rather false fronts of suggestive language behind which there is nothing.

It reflected, finally—this "Don't"—the belief of a precise intelligence that when people talk about symbols and their meanings they are likely, alas, to be

furthest from the kind of responsible reading that good literature demands. Responsible reading. How many times have you tossed a good little poem into the arena (the soon-to-be-bloody arena) of a freshman or sophomore class and been straightway informed that every detail and word of it "stand for" (sometimes they say "symbolize") some specific but utterly remote notion? And when you have protested, a dying Christian, that all those remote, specific, personal "interpretations" (as they are called) cannot be equally right, have you not been told, by some, that that is what it means "to me"; by others, that the test of a good poem is the variety of interpretations it excites; and by others (who may indeed be the what-it-means-to-me people reciting a second time) that there is no way of proving what a thing symbolizes and that therefore it must follow that one reading is as good as another?—so long, of course, as it is a richly imaginative one?

<sup>1</sup> Queens College.



There are several possible sources of these attitudes toward poetry: I believe some high schools are "teaching" poetry which is too difficult for high school students, poetry in which the complexity of thought and language is such that average or even good high school students lack the verbal sophistication needed for its comprehension. They simply do not yet feel language sensitively enough to be able to know, even when told, what such poetry means; and so they substitute personal meanings for the complex meanings that live in the language and structures of such poems. There is also current a tendency to encourage young students to express themselves, to think creatively about the arts; and it may be that it is difficult to cultivate strictness and accuracy of reading at the same time. There may be teachers who are modestly unwilling to impose their beliefs on their students—and others who are unsure of themselves. And still others whose reading of modern criticism has convinced them that anything goes—and who are they to think it possible ever to be sure about what any poem means?

And the problems do not end there. The instructor who launches a full-scale assault upon irresponsible reading is likely to achieve a curious reversal of roles, with the students refusing to find anything but the simplest literal statements and the instructor begging them to entertain at least the possibility that more may be meant than can be found on this most literal level. The unhappy instructor may find himself attacked no more severely by the student who insists on the value and importance of his own private "interpretations" than he is attacked by that same student a few weeks later when he has swung over to the position of a skeptic who will allow nothing that cannot be literally spelt out of a

poem. He sits back and asks, "How do you *know*?"—which is just what his instructor was asking him a few weeks previously; the instructor begs for a co-operative sympathy, for open-mindedness, for a willing suspension of skepticism, but he has already taught his students to give him none of these.

Out of the oscillations between over- and underreading come modulations of the dominant frequency, overtones of lagging or pronounced response which will put a class at cross-purposes with itself, the skeptics and overeager beavers wrestling for the monkey wrench they will throw into the instructor's lesson plan. Some of these problems were illustrated for me when a student in an advanced class in poetry analysis submitted a paper on Wallace Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar":

I placed a jar in Tennessee,  
And round it was, upon a hill.  
It made the slovenly wilderness  
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,  
And sprawled around, no longer wild.  
The jar was round upon the ground  
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.  
The jar was gray and bare.  
It did not give of bird or bush,  
Like nothing else in Tennessee.

The poem, he wrote, was obviously a Republican treatment of the TVA. This particular jar is Norris Dam, "on a hill" in that it joins two hills. "The jar was round . . ." refers to the shape and symmetry of the dam. Its "dominion" is oppressive, unproductive, wasteful ("gray and bare"); it stops river traffic (being a "port"); and it does not give "of bird or bush." This summary does not do justice to the student's paper, for it was full of subtlety and persuasion. When the class assailed him, the author asked them to

tell him why after all the jar was placed on a hill in Tennessee, of all states? And was not the TVA the most significant unnatural establishment there?

Continued discussion brought out some conclusions about symbolism and its uses: One must begin and stay with the immediate sensuous texture of a poem, seeing what ideas or attitudes inhere in the plain language-and-situation of the poem and resisting that impulse to search for a "hidden"—which is what the tyro usually understands by a "symbolic"—meaning. "Anecdote of the Jar" must first be read as a poem about a jar placed on a wild hill in Tennessee. That is what the poem says. Examining how the poem says it, we find riches of suggestion in the words that characterize the situation. The wilderness is slovenly; it sprawls; but around the jar it takes shape and is no longer wild. Since the wilderness itself is just as wild as it was, however, the phrase "no longer wild" must refer to the new composition of the scene, with the round jar in the center. The words that qualify the jar and its effects, however, do far more than acknowledge its function of bringing order (or composition); they render an ambiguous attitude of reserved mockery, amusement, and scorn. The jar, "gray and bare" and "of a port in air," is not beautiful or impressive in itself; it has the color and texture of Norris Dam, but not its dignity; "of a port" is not magnificent or beautiful. It is plump and smug; it is insensitive to the magnitude and vigor of the wilderness over which it takes its curious dominion. Yet there is delight in the definition of these ambiguities, for they are sharply drawn.

Having got thus far by scrutinizing what the poem literally says and suggests, the class raised again the question of symbols and symbolism. It was

agreed, in general, that any so-called symbolic interpretation would have to grow directly out of the tones and connotations found in the close literal reading of the poem—a conclusion arrived at negatively, after considerable discussion during which various fantastic readings were rejected. This negative conclusion is an enormous gain, for it assumes a continuum of meaning from the literal to the "symbolic." It carries with it the assumption that symbolic meanings, at their end of the continuum, will yield to the same close reading that is first applied to the literal statement. (Where the concrete particular and the abstract universal are not continuous, we have allegory—of which more later.)

Assuming the continuum, then, the class offered two propositions: (1) the jar is a symbol of Order; (2) the jar is a symbol of the quality and effects of the machine age.<sup>2</sup> Now which is the more general or universal idea, and which is more tenable for this poem? At first glance it would appear that the jar-as-machine-age is less general than the jar-as-Order and that the former depends on the latter. But no; testing the universal by close examination of the concrete particulars of the literal words, we discovered that the idea of Order is here included in and subordinated to the specific idea of the machine age which the jar seems most definitely to symbolize. It is not abstract Order here but the particular kind of order brought by the machine. Universal Order is majestic. Linked to the gray,

<sup>2</sup> This interpretation is, of course, highly debatable. Stevens' favorite theme is the order imposed by art or the aesthetic imagination. If the words characterizing the jar make it seem beautiful, it would properly be seen as a symbol of art or the imagination; if it is a symmetrical but colorless jar, it might be a symbol of Order; if it is symmetrical but ugly, it may be a symbol of the machine or of the unlovely aspects of man-made order. Much depends on one's reading of the puzzling phrase "of a port."



bare, and portly (mason?) jar, it becomes ludicrous and also formidable. Order under its auspices is a version of divine Reason, if you like, but its glory is yoked to the gray and pompous intentions of commerce. It therefore appears here in a grotesque, evil, and frustrating guise. By this time we find that we are talking about literal meanings, tones and attitudes, and symbolic meanings all at the same time, that no one of these elements can be isolated from the others or understood without considering them. If the reading has been tested and accepted, the continuum has been established and a fundamental method for getting at symbolism has been achieved.

Another way of getting at the objective I have defined is to explore the distinction between a particular symbol and the universal content of any concrete idea or situation. General statements can be made about any particular fact or situation, such as "The cow is a herbivorous mammal." But the cow does not symbolize the idea of herbivorous mammal. Most early student statements of what a poem symbolizes are versions of this error. A student writes, for example, of Housman's "To an Athlete Dying Young," "The athlete who is reduced to nothing in a few years symbolizes man and his illusions of perfection and greatness." This is making a good deal of

Runners whom renown outran  
And the name died before the man,

but, even granting him the right to enlarge upon the status of these ancillary figures in the poem, we must conclude that they do not symbolize "man and his illusions of perfection and greatness." In the first place (and I dwell on this specific error because it resembles a thousand other errors of statement about so-called symbols), these runners cannot

symbolize both man and his illusions. Men are one thing; illusions of perfection are of another order. What the student perhaps meant was that the relation of the runner to his fame symbolizes the relation of man to his illusions of perfection. But the runner's fame lives in the minds of others and "dies" when they forget; whereas a man's illusions of perfection are his own ideas, and they "die" when he is disappointed or disabused or just diverted. One cannot symbolize the other, for the jump from one logical pattern to another cannot be accommodated to the runner-as-symbol. There is nothing in the poem which directs the reader to see in the situation of the runners or in the word "renown" a symbol of illusions of perfection; and any brief discussion will make this fact clear.

Now (to proceed) perhaps what the student meant to mean was that, just as the loss of fame involves bitterness or disappointment, so the loss of illusions of perfection involves bitterness or disappointment. The two losses have in common that they cause, say, bitterness. This purely abstract remark—which is a simple classification, that is, the identification of a quality or aspect that is present in two items—is certainly true in so far as it shows a property common to loss of fame and loss of illusions (which is all many students require to make them cry havoc or "Symbol!"). But can the runner properly be said to symbolize "man and his illusions of perfection"? Loss of fame and loss of a new boat would cause bitterness; but this fact hardly makes the runner symbolize loss of a new boat. He might as well symbolize a nation past its glory, a garden that has withered, a wrecked airplane, or a thousand other items that partake of the same quality or somehow relate to it. Examination shows that the connection between "runners

whom renown outran" and "man and his illusions of perfection" is neither logical nor necessary nor particular nor (most important) exclusive.

Whenever we come upon the problem of symbolism, we are likely to be puzzled by a double-facedness that invites misinterpretations: There is the symbol which seems to "stand" for an institution or a situation or a problem. And then there is the accompanying fact that any situation or problem suggests dozens of similar or comparable problems which ring out around it like the ripples from a pebble dropped into a pond. When Robert Frost in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" says, "But I have promises to keep / And miles to go before I sleep," he is suggesting the thousand obligations and duties which sometimes make life burdensome. They range from a call down the road, which the reader imagines, through some shopping he has promised to do for his wife, through his long-range plans for planting orchards and paying mortgages, out to the burden of life itself which man has perhaps promised his god that he will bear. These notions are suggested by the poem's "promises" and "miles to go"—but can we say they are definitely symbolized in the poem? I think not. I think the student must be shown that he is dealing with the examples or instances which any situation evokes through the imagination. A symbol must have a specific referent or a cluster of them to which it is somehow specifically attached. There may of course be ambiguities, but ambiguities are not the same as the countless examples of "promises" and "miles to go" that one could imagine. If these phrases can be said to symbolize anything, it must be the idea of duty or obligation—and nothing more specific.

If there is a symbol in Frost's poem, it

is the woods—"lovely, dark and deep"—which are identified by the clause that follows them as symbolizing the impulse to escape. This is particular; it is specific; it is an idea carefully prepared for in the poem and then clearly evoked through its symbol. But, then, what about the last word in the poem? Is "sleep" a symbol of death? I should say that death is just one of many instances suggested by the tension of obligation-and-escape which gives the poem its life. Life makes us yearn for death: the thought of death makes us value life. Then can one say that the woods symbolize death, the final escape? Again, I think not, because the woods seem to me specifically to symbolize an impulse (the return to the womb, even?) but not a concept or a state like death. If we can define the specific intention of a symbol, we can then allow our imaginations to universalize the problem or situation in which it operates without losing sight of the symbol's specific reference. The important thing is to make clear the difference between a specific symbol and the general truth that any situation suggests a thousand other comparable and similar situations. Hedda Gabler's pistols are almost literally physical extensions of her personality. They are perfectly fashioned and beautiful, but precise, inflexible, hard, cold, deadly, and destructive. They are, thus, extraordinarily specific symbols of Hedda's personality and of her relation to the other characters.

Returning, now, to Housman's athlete, we find two other passages where the situation is different, where rich and precise symbols can be identified:

And early though the laurel grows,  
It withers quicker than the rose.

And find unwithered on its curls  
The garland briefer than a girl's.

The laurel is a definite symbol of victory. It is placed upon the winner as a sign of victory, and it has also come, in time, to symbolize victory in a way that a blue ribbon does not symbolize victory in a dog show. The distinction is that a sign points, whereas a symbol is. Except perhaps for the ardent dog-breeder, the blue ribbon merely indicates; yet, when the blue ribbon is used to decorate beer cans and beer advertising, we can see that it is on the way to becoming a general symbol—as the laurel has already done. It has become an emotional center and force. It evokes emotions directly, because of the meanings it has acquired; and this emotional force is more than the force of what it points to. The cross and the flag are outstanding symbols which plainly evoke direct responses, in contrast to such obvious signs as "W 26 STREET" or "LOGE" which do not have general direct emotional appeal (although they may have become symbols for certain individuals).

The rose, too, is a symbol. In this poem it can only be a symbol of beauty—because that is what it has generally been and that is what the poem makes it mean within its own structure. The fame that withers sooner even than beauty becomes an object of pathos, tenderness, and pitiful regret in a way that it can do only through the poet's juxtaposition of symbols both of which are possessed of their own magic. In the last two lines of the poem the same qualities of pathos and tenderness, fragile beauty and poignant regret, are evoked by the reappearance of the symbols in a setting. Before, they were presented as general symbols. Here they appear in a tableau—the strengthless dead gathered about the victorious garlanded youth, yearning toward the life which he reveals; the youth in his prime now in the place of shades; and the

image too of a young girl, the rose of whose beauty has, in this place of shades, come to a pale, immobile, perfect stillness. She is there because the rose symbol evokes her; rose, laurel, girl, athlete, and shades make a very definite scene, a scene full of concrete particulars that not merely suggest but actually contain their universal meanings. It is not "reading into" the poem to see youth, beauty, and fame there immobilized before death; these universals must be felt by the responsible reader. Considerably more subtlety and discrimination are demanded of the student who will find that the young athlete has become identified both with and in the girl. Beauty fades, but in this poem it pathetically dies; the girl's qualities of fragility and perfection become assimilated into the image of the dead athlete.

Thus real symbols have magic and life, which they bring to a complex and subtle situation. Here the meaning glows in its own living form. It does not take us off into general ideas or remote and private applications of itself. Properly grasped, it is there to be felt rather than argued about. But argument is necessary and fruitful if it can be directed to show the follies of private improvisations as contrasted with the power of a symbol that has been apprehended as a living, incarnate ideas. The nature of a symbol is the nature of poetry. The special quality of each is that it is powerfully concrete and yet suggests more than can be logically accounted for, because it enjoys a dimension of felt thought which cannot be reproduced by the phrases which attempt to describe it. Because the symbol has a life of its own which eludes mere logic, the instructor may suggest, unintentionally, that its meaning is indefinite and subject to private "interpretations." Again, if he feels the full force of a sym-

bol, he may convey his reaction more clearly than he accounts for it, so that students who have not truly felt the same symbol may (naturally!) conclude that the instructor's reaction is subjective, private, even invented—and so set about devising comparable inventions. Here, I believe, is one major source of confusion about symbols.

A second appears where the instructor, or critic, thinks and explains more powerfully than he feels, so that he may come to define "symbolic" intentions which cannot really be felt by himself or anyone else. Conrad's "Secret Sharer" is a good piece to explore in this connection. It is the story of a captain who has taken as his first command a strange ship with a strange crew in strange waters. While the captain is alone on deck at night, speculating "how far I should turn out faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly" and ironically rejoicing "in the great security of the sea as compared with the unrest of the land, in my choice of that untempted life presenting no disquieting problems, invested with an elementary moral beauty by the absolute straightforwardness of its appeal and by the singleness of its purpose," a swimmer calls softly up to him from the water. He is the mate of the *Sephora*, anchored some distance away; he has killed a truculent sailor during a storm in a fit of fury brought on by exhaustion and exasperation; he is escaping the vindictiveness of his captain, who had been overcome with terror during the same storm. Conrad's captain takes this man, Leggatt, aboard, hides him in his own cabin at great risk, and later enables him to escape, again in the night, by swimming off to an obscure island.

Conrad's captain protects this "murderer" Leggatt because he is a "Conway

boy"; because he recognizes a man of similar age, background, and abilities to his own; because Leggatt has, by his own secret standards, failed in the kind of test which the captain might face but has, in fact, not had to face yet. Thus Leggatt appears to the protagonist-captain as a sort of sacrifice who has absorbed the bad luck that might have defeated him. This comes out clearly when the captain muses, "And as to the chapter of accidents which counts for so much in the book of success, I could only hope that it was closed. For what favorable accident could be expected?"—suggesting that there is a certain amount of ill fortune afloat on the winds of chance which may or may not destroy a man by hitting him when and where he is most vulnerable. The test under which Leggatt failed might very well have destroyed the captain.

Conrad's view is pagan and classically tragic. Leggatt has not only absorbed the current ill fortune. He has also acted, symbolically, as the captain's potential other self; his fate, thus, has been a ritual—a symbolic ritual—sacrifice in which the captain has seen his tragic potentialities enacted and therefore forestalled. Religious ceremonies were originally, the anthropologists tell us, incantations, charms, spells, magic—methods of propitiating, managing, controlling, or duping the gods to avert their jealousy or wrath, to forestall their greedy designs, or to gain temporary control of their powers. One kind of incantation is the dance which imitates and thereby anticipates some divine action—and in doing so forestalls its menace or assumes its power. And as the dance is a ritual incantation, just so is the symbolic action of a story. The ritual dance of evil performed by Leggatt has satisfied (or perhaps duped) the gods and given the captain a



chance to gain control of his ship, his crew, and himself. The risk that the captain takes in protecting Leggatt is, symbolically, his participation in this ritual forestalling. The climax of this symbolism comes, of course, when Leggatt's hat remains floating by the ship and enables the captain to know that he has enough sternway to come about and sail free of the rocks to which, in his part of the propitiating ritual dance, he has brought his ship dangerously close. Thus ritual and reality mingle to make the reader's hair stand on end, as the most effective symbolism always does. It is in this sense that Leggatt's story symbolizes what might have happened to the captain. It is also symbolic as incantation. Like all poetic symbolism, it lives in the story; indeed, it lives and grows in the story, gathering richness and dimensions in action.

I have described this symbolism according to my notion of a continuum: The story is literally about failure (or success) in a man's first major test. It tells, literally, that Leggatt has failed and that the narrator succeeds. It also shows that the captain might have failed because any man can fail under a certain combination of forces. Thus it moves into the universal and says something about the relation of chance and freedom in life. It also recognizes the subconscious and the fact that the will-to-fail (Freud's "death instinct") microcosmically reflects the force of chance in the macrocosm; it can make the captain see Leggatt as an alter ego—not just theoretically, but a felt other self—who dramatizes the captain's struggle against his own temptation to fail by indulging his anger at his steward, his mate, and the exasperating captain of the *Sephora*. This identification goes so far that the captain for a moment doubts the "bodily exist-

ence" of Leggatt—and frequently speaks of his "double" and his "other self." All these meanings are concretely imbedded in the literal narrative.

But how far can one go? If Leggatt has failed, as he so plainly has, can he stand as "the psychological embodiment of the reality, the destiny, the ideal selfhood which the captain must measure up to"? And can he at the same time (as this critic says) be "the embodiment of the captain's moral consciousness"? Literally, Leggatt is strong and firm because, having failed, he has no expectations. Can he "stand for" an ideal to the untested captain? Such a reversal destroys the continuum; if it is possible, anything goes, for nothing can be proved.

Another analysis says:

Kafka's "Hunger-Artist" and Conrad's "Secret Sharer" allegorize (though not exclusively) the problem of the spiritual disunity of the isolated artist.

And, as the writer warms to his task,

"The Secret Sharer" is a double allegory. It is an allegory of man's moral conscience, and it is an allegory of man's esthetic conscience. The form of "The Secret Sharer," to diagram it, is the form of the capital letter *L*—the very form of the captain's room. (It is hinted at, again, in the initial letter of Leggett's name.) One part of the letter *L* diagrams the allegory of the captain's divided soul, man in moral isolation and spiritual disunity. The other part of the letter represents the allegory of the artist's split soul ("the man who suffers and the mind which creates"). The captain stands at the angle of the two isolations and the two searches for selfhood.

Now I should say that these ingenious interpretations cannot be felt in symbols. The critic has protected himself by calling these meanings allegorical. In allegory there is no continuum between the levels of meaning. One meaning is not exclusively and necessarily contained in an-



other. Indeed, the allegorical meaning requires a key of some sort; or else, as in this instance, it rests entirely upon the word of the critic. Allegorical meanings are not generally felt in the concrete particulars of a story; they are likely to be somewhat didactically indicated by the writer; and they demand a mental shifting of gears on the part of the reader—all qualities which symbols most definitely do not possess. Now when a critic elaborates this sort of allegory in "The Secret Sharer" he implies that Conrad put it there and meant his readers to find it and therefore that he included certain definite clues to it. I find more meanings in the story than I have described in my brief analysis, but nothing so specific as the captain's involvement in two distinct searches for selfhood—or that the two parts of the letter *L* stand for "the cap-

tain's divided soul" and "the artist's split soul." These meanings can be thought, but can they be felt?

The complexity of meanings that a poet can evoke with a rich symbol is little short of miraculous; and even more remarkable than the complexity is the clearness and precision of communication through symbols. Symbols are the artist's means of creating patterns of thought and emotion which did not previously exist and of communicating what had previously been ineffable. The challenge to the reader is to penetrate these symbols, to feel and think one's way into them, and so to participate in the artist's perception and creation. Above all, one must resist the temptation to overlay and smother the artist's creation with a creation of his own. The reader, too, must keep his eye steadily on the object.

## *The 600-Word Theme and Human Dignity*<sup>1</sup>

WILLIAM G. PERRY, JR.<sup>2</sup>

I WANT to talk about an underground movement—the noble cause of Educational Resistance. The problems this Resistance poses for teachers of English are of special interest to me, for I started my professional life teaching English. It was the one thing I was sure I could do better than I had ever seen it done. But I soon found that, the harder I taught, the less my students learned. In fact, the better I taught, the less they learned; and I taught so well that they learned practically nothing.

This intrigued me. I decided that the fault lay somewhere in the student's

learning process. In order to clarify this point, I became a psychologist. It gives me great pleasure to be able to report to you what I have learned so that, if it is of any use in the respectable teaching world, you can use it. If it is of no use, at least it may help explain why your students learn so little from you on your good days and so much from you when you know you have been incoherent.

I shall begin by restating the obvious dilemma of all education. (I warn you that everything I am going to say is obvious; the psychologist's job is that of disclosing the complexity with which the obvious lies imbedded in the everyday.) Professor Ulich has stated the dilemma this way: "The modern educator is aware

<sup>1</sup> Address before School and College Conference on English, New York, February, 1951.

<sup>2</sup> Director of the Bureau of Study Counsel, Harvard University.

that his role is not only that of conveying knowledge, but that of a strategist leading those entrusted to him to a deeper realization of their own inherent qualities. This paradoxical task is given to us as educators because human beings are what they are."

Here we have the one business of conveying knowledge and the other of leading students to self-realization, and we have the matter of strategy posed by the nature of the beast. I shall take these in order. As everyone knows, even those who appear to forget, the human race faces an increasingly burdensome task of passing on from one generation to the next the knowledge of what to do and what not to do that man has accumulated from thousands of years of doing the wrong thing—also from thousands of years of doing the futile thing and once in a while the effective thing. This knowledge includes the fine arts and chemistry as well as a number of matters not covered by the formal curriculum. Certain otherwise unproductive persons called teachers are hired full time for the job of boiling this experience down, organizing the concentrate, and pouring it, in what are hoped to be assimilable doses, down the throats of the young. That the young may accept this medicine, we offer them almost every inducement imaginable in the hope of obscuring the simple truth that neither they nor society can afford to have them waste as much time finding these things out as did their elders. This side of the educational dilemma, then, consists of the necessity for analytical deductive presentation of certain problem solutions well in advance of the student's experience of the actual problems. Inevitably the presentation must be authoritative, and frequently it must be disciplinary.

The other horn of the dilemma con-

cerns the business of individual self-realization. We are accustomed to think of this notion as American and as conceived immaculately in the mind of John Dewey. We gave this brain child our tender and exclusive attention in our progressive folly of the late twenties. Nowadays this focus on spontaneous "growth" has re-emerged in the field of psychological counseling. In this activity such singlemindedness appears to have more benign results than it produces in classroom teaching, probably because the counselor can rely on other educators to have done some teaching, perhaps too much. The idea that spontaneity can be trusted is of course hardly a new one in Western thought. Even Comenius was making a kind of summary statement when in 1668 he said, "It is the nature of man without ceasing to discover the infinity of his own desires and of his capacity. He . . . has within his own heart inducements and indeed relentless spurs which make him climb and struggle, panting onwards." Comenius made the plea that these inner inducements be the basis of educational practice so that the individual might get his education "through those activities to which his nature impels him."

A trust in man's inherent urge toward maturity is not new, and because of an essential validity it is part of our democratic ethos and is here to stay. The only difficulty with it is its vagueness. Progressive education said all there was to say, but said it in a way too easy to debunk. Nowadays Erich Fromm, Carl Rogers, and Karen Horney add little to the precision of our thought with their concepts of "self-realization" and "capacity" and "self-actualization." The trouble with these notions lies in their naïve teleology. The modern return toward a neovitalism in biology may force

us yet to accept some measure of teleology in our thoughts about personal development, but we hardly heed to swallow whole a notion of a person with some sort of ultimate "self" all built in for actualizing, independent of cultural experience. When one of your students leaves your course with the wish to become a writer, his wish is certainly a part of the self he wishes to actualize, and it got there by a combination of what was there before and of what he learned from you.

Perhaps I can clarify this notion of self-direction and prepare the ground for what I want to say next by citing some recent and rather frightening evidence from experimental psychology. Bruner, Postman, and McGinnis were exploring the relationship between a person's values and his skills of visual perception. They first established roughly the kinds of words associated with a person's likes, his dislikes, and his indifferences. They then flashed words on a screen one by one, first in a very short flash and then in gradually longer flashes. They would ask a person to keep guessing until he was able to recognize the words. Perhaps it is not surprising at first thought that people were found to require less time to recognize words they like and longer to recognize words they don't like. What gives one pause is the nature of a person's guesswork *before* he recognizes a word he doesn't like or care about. One man cared mainly for intellectual pursuits, a lover of knowledge who cared not a whit where the money came from. When the word "income" was flashed on the screen he experienced great difficulty recognizing it, even when flashed on the screen for a period three times as long as he needed for favored words. His guesses were: "Learning, knowledge, literature, learning, loving, oh, income."

Here is a portrait of a man following

his preferences as long as he possibly can. Clearly enough, if left to actualize himself, he will "notice" matters of interest to him and learn more and more about them, but if a teacher or a wife should want him to learn anything about home economics, a certain amount of teacher-directed emphasis will be required simply to bring the matter to his attention. This selective perception gives us (just in case we want one) a descriptive, nonteleological base for the notion of self-directing, "self-actualizing" behavior.

Now this fellow had nothing in particular *against* income. Asked, he probably would have said he was for it, but busy. What is striking is that his preoccupation served, long before he could be aware of what he was doing, to raise the threshold of his perception against an irrelevant intrusion. He resisted even his own efforts to recognize the word. Even more striking were the responses of people to words they disliked, responses made well in advance of any possibility of their being able to report the identity of the words. When a word they disliked was flashed on the screen in so short a flash that they could not have recognized it had it been a favored word, they frequently made defensive, derogatory guesses like "fraudulence," "hypocrisy," "subversive." Apparently our likes and dislikes, our purposiveness and our opinionatedness, are deeper and faster than we have any way of knowing while we are at it.

What it all adds up to is that, when you try to teach anybody anything, he is going to resist.

It is this fact which puts the two horns of our dilemma on one and the same educational bull. The moment you as a teacher exercise the slightest initiative, your student will start resisting you even against his own conscious intention,

and the extent of the resistance will be in direct proportion to the extent to which your activity is sensed as foreign to his impulse, direction, and values of the moment. That is, he will become, to varying degrees, stubborn. Now this stubbornness will interfere with *your* purposes and call forth from you a quality which we shall call persistence.

The nicety of this distinction suggests that we might do well to take refuge in a scientific objectivity. Let us cool off by referring to the definition of the equilibrium of systems as first stated, I believe, by Le Chatelier for chemical systems. He pointed out that in any system in equilibrium "when a force is exerted on any part of the system, the rest of the system will react in such a way as to reduce the amount of change which would otherwise take place." This law has been found to apply universally to all systems, not simply to mechanical ones such as bedsprings but also to biological and social systems. In these latter systems the notion of equilibrium must include not only a static balance and integrity, and not only Cannon's homeostatis, but also the integrity of a directional growth or change inherent in the system itself, that is, the integrity and equilibrium of its self-actualizing behavior. When one sits on a part of a bedspring, it is fortunate that the rest of the system reacts to reduce the amount of change which might otherwise take place. When my son said to me yesterday, "But you didn't tell me to pick up my shoes; you just told me to pick up my clothes," he was referring to having successfully reduced the amount of change which might otherwise have taken place. Resistance, therefore, is the behavioral manifestation of integrity. It is the means by which the honest man remains honest in the face of temptation; it is the means whereby the ignorant stu-

dent remains ignorant in the face of teaching.

When a student has come to feel about education as something done to him, or something required of him, his more intellectual acceptance of the notion that "it is all for his own good" only adds to his problems. He blames himself for his "laziness" and his lack of "will power." He may work in spurts of conscientiousness, but even then his conflict of purpose will show through. The student nobly "forces himself" to do as he should and nobly defeats the purpose of what he is doing.

You are so familiar with the signs that it is almost painful to review them. There is the student who reads any book on earth but the one assigned. He is the same student who presents you with an "A" theme on the wrong topic. He is more obvious than the diligent, obedient student, your slow reader. You may send this slow reader to the local reading expert to be "speeded up," even over the dead bodies of your favorite misgivings. Here he will learn other methods of being superficial, more obvious and direct than those he *has* been using. You need not worry. He will revert quickly. For his old word-by-word reading had at least two virtues beyond that of preventing him from learning anything: it satisfied his conscience, and it left you well-nigh helpless.

In college this same student will add to his complacent misery by taking endless notes, verbatim. His left finger will be in the book, his right will move the pencil, and the "thought" will go across from one to the other at shoulder level. His active and intelligent mind will then be free to go a-courting. This is a noble victory won in the very chains of educational tyranny.

As an educator and a tyrant yourself,



you are aware that even tyranny must abide by its own rules. Whenever you "require" a theme, the universal question is of course, "How many words?" Who of you has not cringed before this question, and who of you has answered it without the conviction of defeat? And yet you cannot fail to answer it. You know that all your evasions are evasions. If you refuse to answer, you are saying "the rules are suspended," and you must accept the consequences. If you answer at all, all your "more-or-less's," all your statements that other things are more important, will receive the jeers appropriate to such palaver.

And what do you get? You get dropped on your doorstep the most blatant symbols of the underground resistance movement in education: the six-hundred-word themes that are exactly six hundred words long.

You have seen them. You have shuddered before the half-erased figures in the margin or the cool tally in ink at the end of each sentence for all the world like quotation marks. The grand total is sometimes a smug 607.

And then there is the endless debate about the choice of a topic neither "too broad" nor "too narrow" to fit. In this amiable diversion some teachers co-operate with instruction on how to "narrow" a topic and how to "develop" it. That length is a function of what someone has to say and of the willingness of someone else to pay attention is safely lost from view.

Now the English teachers and educationists have agreed on at least one point, namely, that the answer to this sort of thing is the provision of incentives. Especially, I read, one should provide *intrinsic* incentives as opposed to extrinsic incentives. That is, it is the responsibility of the teacher to provide these incentives

fitted as closely as possible to the assignment. To judge by the behavior of the advocates of this solution, the solution is that of sugar in water, applied lavishly with a brush and called "enrichment." The transparency of the resultant sugar-coating was best described in the words of a student who complained to me that, whereas his trouble used to be a lack of incentive, he now had much incentive. "In fact, I've never been so incensed in all my life."

We have all been guilty of this sort of nonsense. And not wholly for nothing. If we examine those times when our good intentions worked, we can see that we were not "providing" incentives at all; we simply got out of the way of incentives which were already there. Incentives are intrinsic to students, not to assignments. As Comenius said, men are moved by inner inducements, and our best work is done when we can appear not as the mouthpiece of our subject matter but as the servant and consultant of the student who is pursuing it. These are the times when a student enjoyed a book, and we shared and enhanced his enjoyment by helping him further his understanding of it. These are the times when we helped a student discover that he had an opinion and then helped him to convey it better than he could have before.

That this sort of situation is so rare and so difficult for a teacher to create should not lead us into the obvious diatribe against the faults of our educational system. The fault is only partly there. A certain amount of the difficulty is simply the result of the inescapable dependency of the young on their elders. Their own desire for independence is highly ambivalent. They will insist that you tell them what to do so that they can resist it. This is, after all, their finest skill, their earliest security. Consider the matter of weekly



tests. Give them, and your older students will complain that you treat them like children; omit them, and the same students will complain that you do not tell them "where they stand." In short, the young will resist even your efforts to reduce their resistance.

Those of us as teachers who cannot respect these limitations as part of the student's honor had best take that offer in Washington or retire in revolt to write that novel about a revolt the glory of which we *can* perceive. If we stay and accept our lot, we can learn that resistance is not fatal unless fought. When the student's resistance is accepted, when through your strategy he finds himself striking at thin air, he suddenly claims the very ground you stood upon. He arms himself in your strength and your armor; he looks abroad more widely, eager to resist what you resist, a state of mind we hail as "maturity."<sup>3</sup>

I have overdone it. It is not like this. In any long slow struggle your strategy must rest on infinite patience and infinite detail. I know you will ask me what of this strategy. I am not here to tell you how to teach English, and, if I speak for a moment concretely, it is for rhetorical purposes only.

I shall speak about the "correction" of compositions. Students are customarily asked to correct their errors, often to collect these corrections in a table of errata indicative presumably of a shiving or a state of absolution. For the student this penance follows perfectly from certain premises and confirms the whole logical system based upon them. You are to him a grader of themes. Themes are written for the purpose of giving you something

to grade. You grade them. If the grade is low, you naturally prescribe penance fitted to the crime. When he has worked out his penance, he keeps the evidence by as a token, in the day of judgment, that he is shriven.

This is a good, coherent logic, but a little distracting from the business of learning how to communicate via the written word. How can you appear to your students not as a grader of themes but as a reader of themes? Since you must grade, you will need every strategy, every honest tactic you can find.

I have always wondered if in correcting a theme it is wise ever to make a declarative comment, much less in the referee's voice of doom to count "sp," "awk," "coh," "id," "pn." Would it be better to ask a question instead, a question that leaves the student something to do, some relevant act of salvation *before* his failures are measured? Would the student perhaps find it more sensible to correct a theme before it is finally graded? To correct it afterward surely holds no more joy and sense of accomplishment than would be attendant on curry-combing a dead horse. Of course, you would by necessity have to count both drafts. But if you wait for the final corrected draft, your student may perceive your comments as helpful guides toward his immediate goal of a grade. (You may note that a so-called "extrinsic" incentive may be just what the student is most worried about.) From this perception of you, the student has not so far to go to the notion that you are helping him with his skill in telling you something interesting in a clear and conventional way. This is a skill congenial to certain inducements which he has within himself.

The teacher of English, in fact, seems to stand in a position of special advantage regarding these inducements. The

<sup>3</sup> Time did not permit a consideration of "flexibility" or of the refinements of resistance and growth, factors which make an absurdity of the inference that the strongest character is the most negativistic.

artistry of literature, well chosen, enlists the student's identification; in the writing of compositions the student has his best chance to see himself as the central figure in his own education.

Perhaps we can sum up our strategy. It seems to me that we must roll with the students' punches, that we must give their resistance as little as possible to work on. We can do this by understanding it. We can even honor our students by honoring it. Then gradually, as they are able to stand it, we can let them find we are not the tyrants they have felt so noble and secure in fighting, but agents of the culture at their service in their own

struggle to master and mature. They will still resist, for even growing has its pains, but unless they have been caught in some long-forgotten battle, they will change their loyalty from fighting to learning what you have to teach them.

All this is the teacher's business, "because human beings are what they are." We should like to avoid it. I remember when I tried to avoid it. Arguing in the faculty room, I said, "All this bosh sounds like uplift; I teach my students *English*."

"Oh," said an elderly strategist, lowering first his newspaper and then his spectacles, "you *do*?"

## *Analogies of Method and Content in Teaching Science and Literature<sup>1</sup>*

T. H. LITTLEFIELD<sup>2</sup>

SCIENCE and humanities departments in engineering institutions have in common, at least, their standing apart from the more "practical" engineering departments. Both offer "practical" courses along engineering lines like applied electronics and report-writing, but, in general, the engineers consider science departments "just theoretical" and humanities departments (to put it politely) "just broadening."

My purpose here is to examine what science and the humanities, specifically physical science and imaginative literature, have in common, so far as the concerns of teaching go, over and beyond the fairly frail linkage asserted by their com-

mon peripherality in relation to engineering. They are different in many familiar ways. Science emphasizes the analytic processes of deduction and induction, while literature emphasizes the processes of the imagination. Science speaks in the conventionalized precision of mathematical language, while literature uses our historic language, complicated as it is with ambiguities and vaguenesses by continuous semantic accretion. Scientific knowledge accumulates constantly, so that the work of each generation, more richly endowed than the last, supersedes that of the last. The endowment of Yeats, Joyce, Eliot, Shaw, and Faulkner will never let them supersede Homer, Sophocles, Dante, Chaucer, and Shakespeare.

These are big differences between science and literature. But the differences

<sup>1</sup> A paper read before the Humanistic-Social Division of the American Society for Engineering Education, Dartmouth College, June, 1952.

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don't reflect opposition any more than the admittedly very real differences between horses and houses do. Science and literature are not opposed to each other as are scientific materialism and literary humanism. The differences don't lead me to despair of my thesis that we can, in teaching literature to engineering and science students, indicate relations between scientific thought and literary thought. I do not propose that literature should be taught as if it were the same as science. They are not the same. I propose that literature be taught as though literature and science were not irreconcilable. They are reconcilable, and it seems to me of utmost importance that this recognition pervade the teaching of literature to engineers and scientists. I don't think it would be a bad thing at all if science teaching recognized it too.

That is to say, I don't see why one shouldn't view the relation as one does that between chemistry and physics, for instance, or between eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century literature. Nobody denies that there are differences between them, though they hold certain views in common. But the differences between all physicists and all chemists or between all eighteenth-century scholars and all nineteenth-century scholars will not be so fundamental as the differences among individuals in the same field. The same situation obtains between scientific and literary studies. In each field there are realists and idealists, conservatives and rebels, theorists and experimentalists, materialists, rationalists, and poets.

The tendency (imaged in the recent books on science and poetry by Douglas Bush and H. H. Waggoner) seems mistaken to identify scientific studies exclusively with materialism; literary and other humanistic studies exclusively with the spirit, with values, with the whole

man. Science seems to include the materialist position as only one along with many others, ranging from Aristotelian functionalism to Berkeleian subjectivism. I don't believe any first-rank modern physicist is materialist in outlook. On the other hand, we can't deny without closing our minds that there are materialists as well as many other sorts among literary scholars. I find it impossible to think of the "scientific" as representing any one particular school of thought, just as I find it impossible to think so of the literary, where there are classicists, aestheticists, historians, academicians, philologists, semanticists, humanists, prosodists, and even romantics.

As a matter of modern fact, one suspects that poets are generally more concerned with facts than are scientists, whose activities relate more to theories. Turn to a physicist for practical advice, and he will likely as not put you off with airy nothings about dimensionality and indeterminacy factors and various epistemological considerations. He will be very unsure that he is in touch with facts at all and will differ with his colleagues as to what facts are. The poet will put you off too, of course, but with facts, for facts and the words for facts are his stock of trade in symbols, just as mathematical conceptions about relations and algebraic signs for them are the physicist's. If you ask for practical advice and get it, you'll probably discover that your informant has something to sell you, like tooth paste or a book or a political party.

And yet I maintain that science and letters are not opposed, though at first glance it might seem nothing could be more opposed than the highly abstract theorizing of scientists and the poet's devotion to hard detail, to fact. It looks like poetic fact against scientific fancy. Just here is where the teaching commences.

Learning comes as our students become aware that the great insights—whether scientific or poetic—are always a synthesis of fact and fancy. Fancy transforms fact to hypothesis or poem in the act of the creative imagination. Newton derived his law of universal gravitation much as Milton constructed his epic of the fall of man. For both of them it was necessary to take a flight, in fancy, to the sun. Both gravitation and *Paradise Lost* owe their forms to the perspective of that flight of fancy. Milton says thither Satan's

course he bends  
Through the calm firmament (but up or down,  
By centre or eccentric, hard to tell,  
Or longitude) where the great luminary  
Aloof the vulgar constellations thick,  
That from his lordly eye keep distance due,  
Dispenses light from far. . . .  
For sight no obstacle found here, nor shade,  
But all Sun-shine, as when his beams at noon  
Culminate from th' equator, as they now  
Shot upward still direct, whence no way round  
Shadow from body opaque can fall, and the air,  
Nowhere so clear, sharpen'd his visual ray  
To objects distant far.

The satanic vision of the universe from the sun's perspective affords the order on which the poem is built. Satan's vision transforms the fruit for Eve and Adam from bare fact like fire, anger, and the adder's sting to the symbol of man's first disobedience. The vision from the sun shows the world as it really is not, but in the guise of what is. This matter of perspective is essential to Milton's avowed aim "to justify God's ways to man," to display the universal relations among which original sin is a particular. So, as bare fact is transformed by fanciful vision, bare Adam is transformed with a fig leaf.

Newton required a similar perspective to explain the mysterious effects of the earth and the moon on their relative

weights. In order to explain what holds the moon in its orbit around the earth, Newton had to imagine himself in the position of a neutral observer on the sun. By taking such a flight of fancy, he freed himself from the relational structure that imposes itself upon the facts of our everyday experience. From the fancied perspective of the sun he saw what is inexplicable from our point of view here on the Hanover Plain or his in the Royal Observatory at Greenwich as a mutual attraction between two celestial bodies.

It may be argued that there is an important difference between Milton's flight and Newton's. Milton's argument hangs throughout on the perspective established for Satan, while, once he has had the idea of considering the relations of moon and earth objectively, *as if* from the sun, Newton's analysis proceeds in terms of the data available to him at Greenwich. Milton *proclaims* Satan's perspective, while Newton ignores his and completes his equation in terms of his direct observations. The poet's *as if* seems more pervasive than the physicist's.

It was left for Einstein to point out that Newton's only oversight was in ignoring the perspective he assumed. The hidden assumptions threw the Newtonian calculations off just the smallest bit, not enough to show up within Newton's frame of reference. Einstein's emphasis was on the role of the observer, on the discrepancies between observations made from differing systems. From this point of view it is a crucial *as if* in Newton's thinking to reason just as though his observations at Greenwich would have been the same from the sun. The deviation wasn't great enough to show up in terms of the relation between earth and moon, but it appeared, among other places, in a peculiarity of the observed



orbit of Mercury that gave later astronomers a good deal of trouble. Einstein's solution was to view gravitational relations not as an observable attraction between bodies but as a characteristic of the structure of space. In the general theory of relativity it is maintained that the presence of matter warps space, so that instead of their being pulled toward one another by a mutual attraction, like love, the earth and moon must be understood to slide toward one another, down the declivities in space their own masses have effected. This is perhaps less like love than like fate, and we are back with the Greeks.

As we literature teachers so often find ourselves in the classroom. Homer explained the action in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* very much the way Einstein explains the movement of the heavenly bodies. Sophocles would have been very much at home in the thought of relativity physics. The structure of the *Oedipus in Colonus* is a frame which yields to the passions of the actors as the structure of Einstein's space yields to the masses of the stars. Leopold Bloom and his fellows move analogously through Joyce's Dublin. What is there in space to yield so to mass, what substance to flow into new forms? According to relativity physics, nothing. Space is empty of material substance as a vehicle for the bodies that give it its shape. It is nothing, a momentous nothing. When the fool asked Lear, "Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?" Lear replied, "Why, no, boy, nothing can be made out of nothing." That nothing turned out to be momentous too.

We tell our students about how a poem comes to us as we read it and, we presume following Coleridge, comes to a poet as he writes it. The word images of the poem evoke visual images in our minds' eyes —

visual images which are not likely to be the same for all readers. We read, for instance, in the opening lines of a familiar Shakespearean sonnet,

That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang  
Upon those boughs that shake against the cold,  
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds  
sang.

We certainly don't all image the same wintry landscape, the same particular trees and yellow leaves, the same "sweet birds," nor do we all see, for "bare ruined choirs," the same visions of ecclesiastical masonry. One of us may see a bomb-shattered Gothic arch vaguely generalized against cold sky; another may see a particular gutted chancel, as I happen to have in my mind at the moment the "bare ruined choir" at Jedburgh Abbey. What we do is, each of us, on each reading, to construct an organic, cohesive pattern of imagery, following and cohering to the word imagery the poem supplies. Just so we construct a metrical pattern within the conventional sonnet structure, depending on the emphasis we allow in any particular reading; and a symbolic pattern, depending on how the connotations of these lines, temporal, horticultural, ecclesiastical, and avian, manage to build and coalesce to a structure in our consciousness; and, finally, all the elementary patterns build into a total pattern which is, for the individual reader and the individual occasion, the poem. Image and thought lead to image and thought in fugal progression, as the parts of the poem flow into its total form. There is no question of knowing where you're going before you get there, or even, necessarily, of being able to say in other words where you've been.

This process, expressed in some such way as this, is hard for a practical-minded student to understand, let alone be-



lieve. It sounds mystical and fishy. But only put it alongside the process described in the general theory of relativity, the process by which the parts of the universe flow to form along the conventionalized abstraction which constitutes the lines of Lobachevskian geometry, and you have two difficult ideas which are mutually illuminating. Doubly so, at least. On the one hand, you may talk in parallel about how matter makes its weight felt on the geometry of space and how an image like "bare ruined choirs" makes its weight felt on the geometry of the sonnet. On the other hand, you may talk about the relation of Einstein to his theory and of Shakespeare to his poem as alike with respect to their creative processes. The freshly perceived images and relations build themselves within the frame of mathematical and metrical conventions, of felt and perceived facts, of abstraction and construct, into the inspired forms of the theory and the poem. And for the reader the processes are much the same. For the man who can read Einstein's equations, the expressed relations exfoliate their meanings much the way we've said the meanings of the poem spread and grow to form. We can even think, metaphorically, of Einstein's theory as a very abstract poem, and of Shakespeare's sonnet as a highly particular theory of existence.

The principle of complementarity (I will refrain from calling it the poem of complementarity) maintains that in some respects a beam of light seems to come in an unbroken wave, while in other respects it seems to be broken into the minute fragments called quanta. This point of view, which was first promulgated in the 1920's, is a resolution—not necessarily the final resolution—of a dichotomy that has occasioned controversy since the days of Democritus. Common-

place observation would indicate that matter is continuous. This oak table top seems to be all of a piece, a massy whole. But the corpuscular theory, following Democritus, maintains that it is composed of minute particles (corpuscles) somehow cemented together to form this table, as other particles are bound, more loosely, to form the water that flows in the Connecticut River. The common-sense point of view that matter is continuous is supported by many experiments. The corpuscular theory is supported by just as many. That neither suffices without the other seems inescapable.

The practical man wants his question answered: "Which is it to be, now, is the world made of atoms, or is it made all of a piece?" Modern science says that in some respects it seems to be one; that in other respects it seems to be the other. "But," says the practical guy (he may be one of our students), "which is it really? Can't you tell?" Science answers that, as far as we can tell at the present time, the two complement each other. Matter is both continuous and discontinuous. "You mean," says the practical Joe (you can see he's a pretty intelligent fellow), "some matter is continuous and other matter is discontinuous?" Science says, "No, that isn't what's meant. What's meant is that any given unit of matter is both continuous and discontinuous." Or so it seems. "Oh, for gosh sakes," says the practical man and walks away.

Now a situation like that is full of possibilities for the teacher of literature. For one thing, we are always faced with the necessity of answering highly general questions about the nature of imaginative literature. What is a poem supposed to be? Is it supposed to be the personal feelings of the man who wrote it, or is it supposed to be objective and the same

for everybody, like two and two make four? "A little of each," we say. What is a poem supposed to be? Is it supposed to be exact and definite and down to cases, or is it supposed to be general and non-committal and give the over-all picture? "You said it right both times," we answer. Well, but I mean, is a poem an experience for the emotions, like sex, or is it for the reason, like calculus? "Both," we insist. "Both, like waves and particles in the quantum theory." "Yeah," says the student, "they told me about that over in the physics department. It doesn't seem to me to make very good sense."

That's where the teaching starts. An analogy is set up for him, and he has the two sides of the analogy to go on, to check against each other and to confirm each other. Before he's out of the maze he's going to have some understanding as to what metaphors are and how they're used, as to the relation of language to reality, as to what tension is in poetry, and what paradoxes are good for, and what drama means. He may have an inkling as to what a poem may be. Besides, he's going to be more receptive next time to his physics teacher as well as to his literature

teacher. This sort of process may not teach the student that all knowledge is one, but it is likely to suggest it to his teachers.

The teachers would be wrong to take the lesson too seriously, in my opinion. If all knowledge is one, all knowledge is also enormously many. Scientific knowledge changes from scientist to scientist and from day to day. The knowledge of the poets changes not only from poem to poem but from reader to reader and from reading to reading. For teaching and for learning, though, it is highly convenient that there are sorts of continuity that run through science and poetry alike and together; these are the threads on which an education may be strong. They are the threads that make the analogical link, and I believe that they are the threads upon which wisdom must hang. Learning is a process of making connections. It is part of the gear of an educated engineer or scientist or poet that he be able to connect, on the job and off it. Science and poetry are as fine tools as man has devised for threading connections. As E. M. Forster says in *Howards End*, "only connect."

### *To a Colleague Promoted*

Professor, be not proud. Fickle Fortuna  
Turns the wheel, and up we go or down.  
Scholars and artists all, we know too well  
The tinsel honors of the cap and gown.

The ermine and the trailing scarlet hood,  
And in the catalogue our Ph.D.'s,  
Assure the world that we are wise and good,  
And seek to make us scholars by degrees.

Minerva, hear our prayer and grant our  
plea;

We beg not knowledge, knowing it is bought  
With patient toil; nor wisdom which must  
come

With sorrow; yet with blear and tearful eyes  
Beseech one Christian boon: save us from  
pride;

The crowned ass is often at the top.

MARTIN STAPLES SHOCKLEY

NORTH TEXAS STATE COLLEGE

## Round Table

### QUIZZING THE DISCUSSION GROUP

In the ideal college each student would come to his literature class ready and eager to express his views on the material assigned for the day. However, in the everyday world, I have found, as I imagine many others have, that fewer and fewer students keep up with the reading as the semester proceeds. In a lecture course this is undesirable but perhaps not fatal; in a discussion group it is disastrous. Either some pressure must be applied so as to give the student a real incentive to keep up or else the instructor finds that the discussion is narrowing down to a very small group, or even that he is in effect lecturing in what was intended to be a group discussion meeting.

Over a period of years I have tried out a number of devices for giving the student the necessary incentive to prepare each assignment ahead of time, all of which have proved, however, to have one or more serious disadvantages. Grading on recitations seems to me to be incompatible with an atmosphere of free discussion. The essay answer test takes too much class time and too much of the corrector's time to be feasible more than very occasionally. Matching question-and-answer quizzes can be given quickly and graded quickly, but they tend to focus on the superficial facts and hence to show whether the reading has been done but not to reveal whether it has been understood. I have tried asking a single searching question to be answered in one or two sentences. The difficulty here is that the papers tend either to break sharply into only two groups, good answers and poor, giving very little distribution, or else to fall into a single group, all receiving A if the question is too easy, D if the question proves to have been too difficult.

For the last three semesters, however, I have been experimenting in a course in the

reading of contemporary short stories with a kind of quiz which I have never seen mentioned, although it may well have been tried by others. Under the instructions "Answer *one* of the following in not more than one sentence" I put three questions, designated as "A," "B," and "C." The "A" question is intended to be such that it can be answered correctly only by a reader who has a real understanding of the central meaning of the story assigned. The "B" question is somewhat easier, and the "C" question is one which can be answered by any student who has read the assignment with care but not necessarily with much thought. The student who chooses the "C" question cannot get better than a C and may, of course, get a D or E. The student who chooses the "A" question, on the other hand, may get any grade up to and including A, depending on the correctness of his answer. Similarly the "B" answer gets whatever it is worth, up to B.

Three typical sets of questions will illustrate the kind of questions asked. The first set is based on "Rain," by Maugham; the second on "The Garden Party," by Katherine Mansfield; and the third on "Mother and Daughter," by D. H. Lawrence.

- A. Why is the story called "Rain"?
- B. List three important character traits of Davidson.
- C. What was Davidson's chief motive for ruining Ohlson?
- A. What is the theme of "The Garden Party"?
- B. What does Laura find out about the world when she fails to persuade her family to call off the party?
- C. Why are the arum lilies not included in the basket to be taken to the bereaved woman?
- A. What are the good characteristics of Mrs. Bodoin?
- B. What are the bad characteristics of Mrs. Bodoin?
- C. Why did Henry leave Virginia?

I do not pretend that this type of quiz is the perfect solution to the problem of keeping the students up with the reading, but its limitations are, I believe, relatively minor. There is something "gadgety" about such a quiz, which I dislike and which I think some students dislike as well. Then too one must be careful, at least with some sections, to resist attempts by a few students to get away with answering two questions or with using more than one sentence or what masquerades as one sentence when it is really two or more. I have found in some groups an inclination to try for the "A" question to the exclusion of the others even if it is only a wild guess. One solution here is to grade "A" questions severely. If imperfect answers to the "A" question are graded B too often, students naturally tend to take a chance on the "A" question. If imperfect "A" answers never get better than C and imperfect "B" answers never get better than D, there is a real incentive for the student to choose the "B" or "C" question unless he is quite confident that he has the correct answer for the more difficult question.

Experience with five different sections over a period of a year and a half has persuaded me that these disadvantages and difficulties are far outweighed by the advantages. The quiz can be given in five minutes, and twenty papers can be graded in fifteen minutes. It is therefore possible to give a quiz at every second or third meeting. This means that there will be enough quiz grades so that the individual student is not seriously penalized by one or two instances of bad luck. The student is given an excellent motive for keeping up on the reading, for thinking about the reading, and for defending his own interpretation of the reading. The result is that students who would otherwise remain silent are drawn into the discussion. Those few who still do not join in can be brought in, at least at times, by referring to their papers and calling upon them to explain their position. A glance at the papers as they come in reveals any divergences of opinion and thus shows what points need to be cleared up. Finally, and this is what has

done most to persuade me to continue using the method, I have found that the average of a student's grades on these quizzes coincides in nine out of ten cases with the opinion of his work which I have formed from his contributions to class discussion. It seems to me, therefore, a quick, easy, and accurate method of insuring that the students get the most possible out of their work in literature.

JOSHUA MCCLENNEN

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

#### A SUBSTITUTE FOR REMEDIAL ENGLISH

The English department of Marion College decided, after years of testing, that the remedial course in English failed to bring the desired results. The department found that the remedial course, given without credit, increases in the student innate resentment, resentment that he must spend extra hours on assignments as long and demanding as the average credit assignment. Because the material is old stuff that he has mulled over since grade-school days, the student concludes that he must be pretty stupid to need a rehash. As a result he acquires a feeling of inferiority, and motivation is hopeless.

Students who are in need of a remedial course are, invariably, those who rate as sixth- and seventh-grade readers both in speed and comprehension. These students take no joy in reading. This dislike affects their oral and written work in every subject.

It seemed logical then that we must change their reading habits and help them to acquire an ease in reading. For this reason the English department decided to substitute for the remedial course a course in children's literature given for credit.

According to our catalogue, the children's literature course may be taken only after consultation with the chairman of the department. This requirement in itself was a step in the right direction, for it lends an aura and lifts it out of the "required-result-resentment" category. At the consultation



we emphasize the value of the course for those who want to select good literature for children. The altruistic motivation works.

The course integrates well with the freshman composition course in (1) reading for speed and comprehension, (2) evaluation of literature, (3) oral presentation, and (4) written work.

We use in the freshman English course Norman Lewis' *How To Read Better and Faster*. The simple language of children's literature is splendid for the speed practice and gives the student a sense of accomplishment when he finds that his speed increases from 150 words a minute to 400 or more words with high or perfect comprehension. In children's literature the student is reading below his frustration level and acquires new interest and joy in reading. Through the confidence he has acquired and his new interest in reading, he is soon ready for more mature work.

In studying the simple folk tale the student learns the fundamental principles of a good story, learns to separate plot from theme, easily detects the conflict, and notices the repetitions so obvious in the folk tale. It is an easy step to a study of the short story in the *Atlantic*, the magazine we study in the freshman English course. The nursery rhymes, limericks, and children's poetry he finds most amusing and enjoys discovering alliteration, assonance, and all the sound devices. He is awakened to the qualities of good poetry and is curious to investigate more mature poetry when he discovers that the fundamental principles are the same. The myths, incidentally, are invaluable as a foundation for the sophomore survey course in English literature.

Because his imagination is aroused and a new joy and ease in reading have been acquired, the student is well on his way to mastering deficiencies in English. Some of the deficiencies stem from his inability to express himself. Through the emphasis on storytelling he realizes that he must express himself simply and clearly, for he must tell the stories to his classmates and frequently to children between the ages of four and six.

Written assignments are based on practical problems of children's reading. Students are asked, for instance, to suggest to a mother a birthday-gift book for a child of six years. In selecting the book, the student must consider all details necessary in making a wise choice. Because they are intensely interested in the subject and take pride in their knowledge of children's books and how to evaluate them, they write naturally and with ease. The written projects are mimeographed so that all students have a copy for class criticism. Through their interest in the material, they master those details of grammar they formerly found distasteful.

We do not aim at making this course an easy one; on the contrary, it is most demanding. Through the simple, delightful reading that the student tackles with genuine enthusiasm, his imagination is aroused, and he is no longer baffled. Through his intense interest he masters details formerly incomprehensible to him.

ELIZABETH EYSTER

MARION COLLEGE, MARION, VIRGINIA

#### ASSIGNMENT FOR THE FUTURE

Since the classroom is supposed to be preparation for future living, is it advisable that almost all teaching effort be directed toward assignments that the instructor will correct or supervise? Granted that current assignments instill attitudes and skills (as well as a modicum of information!) that will be useful long after most of the details are forgotten, yet why not prepare directly for some schemes to be carried out when the course is a memory and a mark is no longer even a ghost of a motivation?

In freshman English, I devote two periods to a discussion of books to be read when the term is finished. This may seem a waste of time, for I have no control over the student's habits once he has left my class. But I believe that none of us likes to be short-changed, and, if I can convince the freshman that his reading one or several of these books will be of benefit to him, I don't have to worry about what he will do.



First, I hand out a list of approximately forty good books (by conventional standards) which I have enjoyed reading. Mine is no list of the world's greatest writings, but entertaining books that have enough plus values to make them significant works. I include *Joseph Andrews* and *Gulliver's Travels*. I exclude Plato and Aquinas for no better reason than that I have never found them emotionally stirring.

Then I ask who has read any of the books. Almost every student admits to at least one of them, and a few have read more than half a dozen. I pander a bit to the idea (which I believe in) that students, even if untrained, are as a group likely to have some valid opinions about their reading. And I discover that almost all have found pleasure in those items familiar to them. My point, of course, is to prove to the class that their fellow-students have read and enjoyed the various books that I'm recommending.

After this we deal with the advantages to be gained from these books aside from the mere enjoyment of reading. The list is a versatile one (I refrain from giving it because I believe that each teacher should make up his own so that he may speak honestly and enthusiastically about it). Many countries and various eras are represented. Numerous social classes and economic conditions are

dealt with. Protagonists range from a young boy to an elderly woman. I point out that the first item is Asch's *Nazarene* and the last is Zola's *Nana*. Perhaps it is a weak joke, but my students find it amusing that, in going from *A* to *Z*, the list descends from questions of divinity to questions of deviltry.

The foregoing takes the full period; the next period is spent briefly discussing the plots and problems of ten or twelve of the selections. Students are encouraged to take a few memos on any book that seems likely to interest them. I suggest that those who have read anything on the list when they were young and immature (none find this amusing) may have missed much that is significant. A glimpse at *Gulliver* and his problems is sufficient to prove this point.

Are the two periods well spent? Yes, if each student later goes on to read even one of the suggested books. Does he? Such statistics are difficult to obtain. But every so often I meet a former student who takes me to task for one of my selections and at the same time mentions another that he particularly enjoyed. Apparently the two periods are worth while as far as some are concerned.

NORMAN NATHAN

UTICA COLLEGE OF SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

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## Letters to the Editor

To the Editor of "College English":

Slightly more than an hour ago I was participating with eighteen members of my Advanced Composition course in a very interesting class.

At its conclusion I came here to my office and began a check of today's mail, which contained among other things the February issue of *College English*. A glance at the table of contents halted on the provocative title: "Don't Read That Book—Flesch-urize It First." Not yet completely detached from my previous classroom activity and possessing, moreover, certain antipathies to the Flesch formula, I was ripe for the article.

Mr. Robert A. Dufour with consummate skill has out-Flesch-urized Flesch by means of that inventor's own weapons. His ironical thrusts at Flesch, made always with an accompanying "tongue-in-cheek" technique, do more to overpower Flesch than could any other conceivable method of opposition.

I do not wish to condemn in wholesale everything that has been suggested by Mr. Flesch, but I have hated to see so many individuals hold up his cold measurement stick as a fetish for editors, writers, and teachers of composition.

Mr. Dufour's final blow, in which he quotes from Flesch, has returned my thoughts to the Advanced Composition class which I have previously called very interesting. And what made it so? Was it because I had conducted it on a "scientific basis" and had rigidly conditioned all participants? Hardly. Its interest emerged from the actual creativity produced and shared by both students and teacher.

On the day that teachers of composition are able to evaluate student writing by some kind of slide-rule or mathematically standardized check sheet, then all creative teaching will have gone out of the course. And an

even more dire threat—creative thinking by student writers will be reduced to mere counting, weighing, and mixing of definitely prescribed ingredients kitchen-tested by a regimental group of recipe-makers.

My thanks to Mr. Dufour for taking the force out of Flesch.

R. KATHLEEN WHETRO

University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio

To the Editor of "College English":

I should like to correct a few of the major misstatements and false inferences in Robert A. Dufour's attack on my readability formula in his "Don't Read That Book—Flesch-urize It First" in the February issue of *College English*.

1. Most of Mr. Dufour's article is based on an analysis of classics and of poetry. He doesn't mention that my formula is designed to measure the readability of current prose.

2. Mr. Dufour's comparative statistics are obviously based on single examples. He doesn't mention that 25 to 30 samples are needed to estimate the readability of a book.

3. Mr. Dufour's article creates the impression that my formula is an absurd little gadget that I invented—by sheer stupidity, I suppose. He doesn't mention that it is part of a large body of research in readability and that its scientific validity has been proved many times.

Readers of *College English* who are interested in this matter will have no trouble in finding out for themselves whether there is anything in my formula or not. I can hardly assume that any of them would consider Mr. Dufour's article as a source of objective information.

RUDOLF FLESCH

Dobbs Ferry, New York

To the Editor of "College English":

I could wish that Professor Thomas Dunn [*College English*, February, 1953, pp. 287-89] had met squarely the main issue of my article. His reply does not state that *The English Language Arts* on page 276 declares: "Spoken language is the language. . . . Therefore, as the linguist points out, the language of today is not to be identified with that found in books but is to be found chiefly upon the lips of people who are currently speaking it." The whole weight of NCTE has been placed behind the book and presumably behind this statement. I cannot understand why I should be accused of making a misstatement. My guess is that Professor Dunn is quarreling with the wrong person.

Strangely, Professor Dunn states that there is no authority for my statement about speech sounds in animals. Yet I find that the first sentence of his book, *Learning Our Language*, begins thus on page 3: "In its broadest and most general sense, language may be said to be any means of expressing emotional or mental concepts by any living being or beings whatsoever. . . ." If he has changed his mind, he should not accuse me of making a misstatement.

As to the superiority of written or spoken language, Professor Dunn begs the question by assuming that Falstaff's speech is a transcript of the actual speech of a living person and not a creation written by Shakespeare. If there is available a record of Jack's actual words, let us have it. It would be a world-shaking discovery.

Apparently, prose style is to be equated with a few usages. This is a strange narrowing of the concept of style. *Ain't* only incidentally has anything to do with style in the sense that I employed the term. If the technical terms of grammar came to us from Greek and Latin through oral transmission, the proof would be interesting.

Unhappily, Professor Dunn has not looked at current publications to see what is being written by linguists about the primacy of the spoken language over the written language. If he were to read these writings, he would not fall into the errors he has. I rather think that he would say with me that today the standards of the English language are to be derived from written and not from spoken usage.

HARRY R. WARFEL

University of Florida

## What Do You Think?

*College English* hopes next year to run symposiums on such issues as we list below, and we invite our readers to contribute statements of *not more than 600 words* on any of these:

1. Should the college take responsibility for making literate those students who are not literate at matriculation?
2. How can we teach usage to secure habitual correctness and clarity?
3. What should we do about individual differences among our students at the college level?
4. When should the teacher of literature lecture? When allow or provoke discussion?
5. What are the relative merits of extensive versus intensive reading of literature?
6. Should controversial subjects—for example, communism—be discussed either in literature or in communication classes?
7. Should the college teacher of English try to raise student taste in movies, radio, and television?

We also invite you to tell us which of these problems you most wish to see discussed and to propose others you may think more urgent.

Send your contribution *before September 1*, if possible.

THE EDITORS

## Current English Forum

Conducted by the NCTE COMMITTEE ON CURRENT ENGLISH<sup>1</sup>

### OUGHTN'T AND HADN'T OUGHT

In *College English*, VII (April, 1952), 398-99, Miss Margaret M. Bryant discussed the negative forms of *ought* and reached the conclusion any South Carolinian would reach—that *oughtn't* is a much more natural form than *hadn't ought*. The records of the *Linguistic Atlas* and associated projects give us further evidence on which we may base our judgments. A full discussion of the data from the Atlantic Seaboard is found in E. Bagby Atwood's *A Survey of Verb Forms in the Eastern United States*; this is a summary of his conclusions and an interpretation of data from England and from the Middle West as covered by the regional surveys under A. H. Marckwardt and Harold B. Allen.

Along the Atlantic Seaboard *oughtn't* is practically universal south of the Mason-Dixon Line and in Pennsylvania south of the New England settlements in the northernmost counties. It was recorded from about half the informants interviewed in New Jersey but is very rare in New York State and in New England. Only 6 New Yorkers (3 in New York City) of 160 interviewed and only 18 New Englanders of 416 offered the phrase spontaneously or used it in conversation. Since 5 of the 18 New Englanders who used *oughtn't* were cultured informants, it probably has some social standing in that section; but 5 of the 6 New Yorkers who used it were of the most old-fashioned type. Farther west, *oughtn't* is very rare in Michigan (1 occurrence), slightly less rare in Wisconsin (6 occurrences, mostly in the Mississippi Valley and in the southern coun-

ties), and fairly common in the southern counties of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, though not nearly so common as in the Midland and Southern areas of the Atlantic Seaboard.

*Hadn't ought*, on the other hand, is characteristically a northern form, found almost exclusively in New England, the Hudson Valley, and settlements derivative from those areas. Except for the very conservative area between Chesapeake Bay and the Neuse River, North Carolina, there are hardly half-a-dozen instances of *hadn't ought* south of the Mason-Dixon Line. However, early settlements from New England have made *hadn't ought* common in southern New Jersey. A majority of Michigan and Wisconsin informants use it, as one would expect from the New York and New England origins of the earliest settlements in these states. Thanks to the important New England settlements in the Western Reserve and the Marietta area, *hadn't ought* seems to occur throughout Ohio; it occurs relatively far south in Indiana and Illinois, even in communities of southern derivation. In the Upper Mississippi Valley it appears to be relatively less common than in New England or New York State but is still more frequent than *oughtn't*. Informants who hesitate to use *hadn't ought* seldom replace it with *oughtn't* but either substitute *shouldn't* or use the uncontracted *ought not*. Except for the South, where it is clearly a relic, *hadn't ought* is not restricted to any social group; in New England, New York State, and the Middle West it is used by many cultured informants.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Margaret M. Bryant, chairman, Harold B. Allen, Adeline Bartlett, Archibald A. Hill, Kemp Malone, James B. McMillan, Albert H. Marckwardt, Russell Thomas, John J. Winburne, and Harlen M. Adams.

<sup>2</sup> Some cultured speakers who do not use *hadn't ought* apparently have it as an underlying form, which is reflected in the statement-question expecting an affirmative answer: *I ought to do it, hadn't I?*

In the folk speech of southern England, both *oughtn't* and *hadn't ought* were recorded for the Atlas. *Oughtn't* occurs 7 times, in records from Middlesex, Cambridge, Worcester, Leicester, Rutland, and Lincoln; *hadn't ought* 19 times, from Kent, Sussex, Somerset, Gloucester, Oxford, Warwick, Northampton, Buckingham, Bedford, and Huntington. In East Anglia the prevailing form is *don't ought* (14 occurrences); in the southern and southwestern counties *didn't ought* (15 occurrences, plus one in Suffolk); 1 Lincoln informant uses both *don't ought* and *didn't ought*, with a difference in time. The American records so far contain no examples of *don't ought* and only 4 of *didn't ought* (2 in New England, 1 in northern Illinois, 1 in northern Michigan), plus 5 of *shouldn't ought* (Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, central Illinois, and southern Ontario), 1 of *hadn't oughtn't* (central Indiana), and 1 of *oughtn't ought* (eastern North Carolina). Occasionally, one encounters *had oughtn't*.

In the preliminary investigation of the speech of the Maritime Provinces, Henry M. Alexander did not elicit this item from all informants. Of those from whom he recorded it, 7 used *oughtn't*, 2 *hadn't ought*, 6 *didn't ought*, and 1 *should ought to not*. From 6 informants in southern New Brunswick, including a cultured informant, Guy S. Lowman recorded only *hadn't ought*.

The affirmative *ought* or *had ought* was systematically investigated only in the middle and South Atlantic States, though occasional examples were recorded in New England. From the evidence it appears that *had ought* is much more restricted than *hadn't ought*, both geographically and socially. It occurs only in eastern North Carolina and in the New England settlement area within the areas where *hadn't ought* occurs, but it is far less common; none of those who were recorded as using it were cultured informants. One informant in eastern Ontario and another in eastern North Carolina used *should ought*.

The evidence suggests that in evaluating *hadn't ought* and *oughtn't* we are dealing with regional variants rather than with social variants. While each of us is naturally predisposed in favor of the form we grew up with, there is nothing to be gained by stigmatizing the other form as substandard or spending a great deal of time on the problem. If a student comes to college using one of these variants, it is almost certainly in good standing in his community; and, if he doesn't use it, he needs to learn only that it is part of the language habits of people as well educated as he is.

RAVEN I. McDAVID, JR.

WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

Andre Roch, leader of the recent Swiss attempt to climb Mt. Everest, was lecturing not long ago in London. He began by asking his audience to be indulgent toward his English. "It is a language I do not speak very well," he said, "since I learnt it in the United States."—*Manchester Guardian*.



## Report and Summary

### NCTE Election Notice

In accordance with the constitution of the National Council of Teachers of English, the Board of Directors at its meeting last Thanksgiving Day chose Paul Farmer, Helene W. Hartley, Helen K. Mackintosh, Mark Neville, and Dora V. Smith as a Nominating Committee to propose officers for 1954. Through Paul Farmer, the chairman, the committee offers these nominees:

*For President:* LOU LABRANT, New York University

*For First Vice-President:* JOHN GERBER, State University of Iowa

*For Second Vice-President:* JOSEPH MERSAND, Long Island City High School, New York City

*For Secretary-Treasurer:*<sup>1</sup> W. WILBUR HATFIELD, 8110 South Halsted, Chicago

*For Directors-at-Large:* RICHARD A. MEADE, *University of Virginia*; KARL DYKEMA, Youngstown College; MILACENT GRIMES OCVIRK, Ithaca, New York, High School; HELEN F. OLSON, Queen Anne High School, Seattle, Washington; WANDA ROBERTSON, University of Utah; LORIETTA SCHEERER, Redondo Beach, California, High School.

This slate will be presented for action at the meeting of the Board next November. Other nomination(s) may be made by petition(s) signed by twenty Directors of the Council and presented to the Secretary of the Council, with the written consent of the nominee(s), before August 16. When Mr. Farmer moves the election of the committee's nominees, other nominations may be made by members of the Board.

### About Education

TWO ISSUES OF THE *SATURDAY Review* (March 7 and 14) deserve sharp scrutiny. The first is concerned mainly with problems of education, the second with new writers. In the March 7 issue Claude Fuess warns against anti-intellectualism; Sloan Wilson compares the textbooks of twenty years ago with those of today; Bernard Kalb surveys the textbook industry; and the *SR* presents five reports from five towns where co-operation between the school systems and their local communities has improved. The issue of March 14 contains an important survey of the creative achievements of the American postwar generation. It includes fiction, literary criticism, poetry, American history and biography, drama, movies, music, and the fine arts. There is also an interview with Ralph Ellison, "Side-lights on Invisibility."

SIX REPRESENTATIVE PROGRAMS in the humanities are described by Arthur Berndtson in the February *Journal of Higher Education*. The programs vary considerably in content, method, and administration, and the six colleges and universities differ widely in geographical location, size, student body, functions, and educational philosophy. The schools are the universities of Arizona and Chicago, Columbia and Wesleyan universities, and St John's and Scripps colleges.

A NATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS project, already underwritten by half a million dollars, has been established at Michigan State College. Its principal objective is to "assist administrators and information workers in land-grant institutions and the

<sup>1</sup> The Executive Committee is proposing constitutional amendments which will abolish this office.

United States Department of Agriculture in using communications more effectively and in reaching more people with useful information." The program originated with the American Association of Agricultural Editors. Council members who heard John Thomas Gould's amusing analysis of the language of agricultural pamphlets at the Boston meeting will wonder whether he did not touch the button!

IN AN EFFORT TO BRIDGE THE GAP between high-school and college English teaching, a forward step has been taken at the University of Kansas. In the February issue of the university's *Bulletin of Education*, the lead article is by members of the Department of English, who describe "How the K.U. Student Learns English." This is a full and careful discussion of the university's English program. Since the *Bulletin* normally reaches every school in Kansas as well as a number of out-of-state schools which send students to the university, it provides a direct and specific answer to the perennial cry of high-school teachers—"What do the colleges expect?" "What do they do?"

THE EDUCATION OF SUPERIOR STUDENTS is an active concern not only of British and American educators but of Hawaiian as well. The University of Hawaii is holding a workshop this summer in the education of gifted children. The course will focus on such problems as developing teaching techniques and instructional materials for use with children in normal classes, and exploring possible uses of the contributions of the gifted children in the school program.

A NEW DOCTORAL PROGRAM IN the field of remedial reading has been established at New York University. The program has been designed primarily for teachers, clinicians, and psychologists and will center around a sequence of courses on the diagnosis and correction of reading disabilities. A number of psychology courses will be required, so that the students specializing in this area may better understand and deal with emotional as well as reading problems.

A GRADUATE SUMMER SCHOOL INTENDED primarily for elementary- and secondary-school teachers will be held during July and August at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut. The course will lead to a new degree of Master of Arts in liberal studies. The purpose of the program is to help teachers broaden themselves intellectually and aesthetically as well as professionally. Courses will be offered in five major areas of the liberal arts—music and the theater, literature, visual arts, psychology and anthropology, natural sciences and mathematics, and history, government, and economics.

A STUDY OF THE EDUCATION OF women is being sponsored by the American Council on Education and financed by the Ellis L. Phillips Foundation. A commission, with Esther Lloyd-Jones of the University of Pennsylvania as chairman and Althea K. Hottel of the same institution as director, will conduct the study by compilation of known facts, research, pilot studies, etc.

MOST PERSONS FAMILIAR WITH INSTRUCTION in good high schools and in the early years of college agree that these are not well articulated. There is repetition, with loss of valuable time and invaluable student interest; there are also some worth-while learnings omitted. Last month we reported two studies, financed by the Ford Fund for the Advancement of Education, trying in different ways to eliminate the repetition and get bright students through college earlier. In the February *NEA Journal* Paul Elicker, executive secretary of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, recommends that any shortening of education should be through reduction of the length of collegiate preprofessional training. Enrichment of curriculum and of courses already in the curriculum will best meet the needs of bright youngsters of high school age, he thinks.

ATTACKS UPON UNESCO SEEM TO arise partly from the same motives that produce attacks upon freedom to discuss

controversial issues in the schoolroom and also the loyalty oaths. Fear, almost panic, in the face of the unfathomable Communist policies is natural. Those not accustomed to political thinking or perhaps to much generalized thinking of any sort are likely to turn to immediate and radical action. Ignorance—not illiteracy or lack of schooling, but ignorance of sociological and political principles—is too common for our national safety. Patrons opposed to UNESCO or in favor of the oaths and loyalty probes (some of which are witch hunts) have a right to insist that the schools shall not conduct propaganda for UNESCO or against oaths. Open and informative discussion of such issues is, however, entirely within the rights of any teacher of English and/or social studies and of his students. Belief in democracy must assume that the majority when they know the facts will make the right decisions.

THE (NEA) COMMISSION FOR THE Defense of Democracy through Education reports in Bulletin 47 the Oklahoma Supreme Court decision against that state's loyalty-oath law. Bulletin 48 reports that the congressional committees are starting to "probe" the foundations. We pointed out last month that *Strengthening Democracy*, published by the Board of Education of New York City, is openly attacking "fallacies of association" and supporting UNESCO.

"THE CLASSIFICATION AND PUNCTUATION of the Conjunction 'For,'" by Henry L. Wilson, appears in the December *American Speech*. After demolishing the arguments that *for* is a co-ordinating conjunction, Wilson shows that, when a sentence containing a clause introduced by *for* is changed to indirect quotation, the other (independent) clause is preceded by *that* but that *for* is neither preceded nor followed by this sign of noun clauses—its clause is obviously subordinate. He also shows that the co-ordinate conjunctions may connect two subordinate sentence elements of equal rank—phrases, for instance—but that *for* can-

not. He concludes that *for* is a subordinate conjunction.

He thinks—mistakenly, we believe—that *for* as a conjunction is always preceded by a comma. We agree that it should be, in order to show that it is not a preposition, and we agree that no further rule or explanation about it is necessary for ordinary students.

WHETHER TO DIAGRAM SENTENCES is discussed again in the February *Clearing House* by Don M. Wolfe. His title, "Diagramming: Trust Your Own Experience, Not Theories," summarizes his article. He says there is no experimental evidence to prove that diagramming is or is not an economical and effective method of teaching grammar. He explicitly avoids debating the value of teaching grammar, but he obviously feels that systematic grammar should be taught.

"DESCRIPTIVE LINGUISTICS AND the Teaching of English," an address by Robert A. Hall, Jr., at the fifth annual Conference on Communication at the University of Wisconsin, July 15, 1952, is printed in *Education* for February. As a parent, Hall is disturbed by the traditional untruths about the English language which conscientious teachers tell his children. Linguists now know much more about language than we formerly did. Study of other languages, especially of some which have structures quite different from that of European tongues, helped them to see English with fresh eyes and to realize that its grammar often diverges from that of Latin.

Hall makes several other points difficult to state clearly in our limited space.

TWO EDUCATIONAL BENEVOLENCES overseas are open to those who have funds available.

1. The NEA Representative Assembly last summer indorsed the Overseas Teacher Relief Fund and recommended that it be used in part "to help meet the needs of teachers in Korea for food, clothing, and educational equipment." This fund is collected and managed by the NEA.

2. CARE, which has been well advertised, has a special English-Language Instruction Package, which costs \$10.00. Details may be secured from Care Book Program, 20 Broad Street, New York 5.

"THE DILEMMA IN MODERN EDUCATION" (January *National and English Review*) is defined by T. L. Jarman as a choice between selecting children of superior intelligence and training them as an intellectual elite or—in answer to egalitarian claims of the age—providing for all a common and equal education. He thinks that much fruitless argument has gone on both in Britain and in America because the word "education" is used for two different processes, for general elementary and social training and for the severe intellectual discipline of the few. He thinks both are important, and, if we stop confusing them, we may be able to make a proper start toward meeting the needs of all.

IN "DEMOCRACY AND PRIVATE Education" (winter *Pacific Spectator*) Lynn White, Jr., president of Mills College, takes issue with the point of view of President Conant of Harvard that "the greater the proportion of our youth who attend independent schools, the greater the threat to our democratic unity." He thinks that in a world "which is being smothered by the fungus-like growth of the state"—a process from which America is not immune—the mere fact of their freedom has a positive

value scarcely conceivable in the past. He believes that "if we are to combat the world-wide tendencies toward the building of a monolithic society," it is of supreme importance that we retain our private schools, colleges, and universities—even Harvard—"not merely as outmoded curiosities, but as palpitating centers of freedom and cantankerousness." A specific illustration of his thesis that independent schools can help to guard freedom of thought just because they are independent is implicit in current contrasting attitudes toward information about the United Nations. In Los Angeles the Board of Education has banned from the public schools the use of all materials relating to the United Nations, but Verde Valley College, an independent preparatory school at Sedona, Arizona, is this spring taking fifty students of high school age on a three-week field trip to Mexico so that they may study at first hand the United Nations program for undeveloped countries. The trip is a highlight of a new integrated study of the United Nations launched by the school this semester and is designed to give the students "on-the-spot" insight into international and cultural problems.

MORE THAN FOUR HUNDRED PERSONS attended the CCCC's annual spring conference held this year March 13-14 at the Sherman Hotel, Chicago. A complete report will be published in the fall issue of the CCCC *Bulletin*. The 1954 spring conference will be held in St. Louis.

### About Literature

THE BOLLINGEN PRIZE IN POETRY has been awarded by Yale University Library to Archibald MacLeish for *Collected Poems, 1917-1952* and to William Carlos Williams for his entire work. Each poet will receive the full \$1,000 prize. MacLeish had already received the 1952 National Book Award for Poetry, as reported under "New Books" in our April issue, and Williams had received it in 1950. The Bollingen judges were Leonard Bacon, chairman, Louise Bogan, Malcolm Cowley, Richard Eberhart,

and Winfield Townley Scott; they were, of course, ineligible for the prize. If MacLeish receives the Pulitzer Prize this year, he will equal the clean-sweep record set by Marianne Moore last year. The choice of two poets as different as MacLeish and Williams is evidence of considerable catholicity of taste.

The Newbery Medal for "the most distinguished story for children published in 1952" was awarded to Ann Nolan Clark. Her 1952 book is *Secret of the Andes*, published by Viking.



**BRITISH BOOKS OF THE MONTH** IS a periodical somewhat similar to American *Bookseller's Monthly* and *Publisher's Weekly*. It reviews the new books fully enough for a discriminating reader to know whether he is interested and in a supplement lists "Books To Come" with brief annotations. British Book Centre, Inc., 122 East Fifty-fifth Street, New York 22.

A UNIVERSAL COPYRIGHT CONVENTION has been drafted by UNESCO and signed by representatives of thirty-six nations. If the governments ratify this convention, the copyright situation will be greatly improved. Each state will give works copyrighted in the others the same protection it gives those of its own nationals. The convention makes "wise and equitable provisions for translation." UNESCO is to act as secretariat for the Intergovernmental Commission which is to supervise its application.

NEW AMERICAN LIBRARY ANNOUNCES that it has sold a total of 30,000,000 copies of books by Erskine Caldwell. It also says that sales of the first two issues of *New World Writing*—somewhat like *New Directions* (I to X) and *Cross Section* of some years ago—add up to more than 250,000. So the "little magazine" editorial policy has been transferred to a semiannual publication with mass circulation. The *Odyssey* is a leading seller at \$0.35.

TWO PUBLISHERS, RANDOM HOUSE and another, are now starting to place a one-page biographical sketch of the author on the back page of each book. The idea was suggested by Charles T. Duncan, of Oregon State College.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON FIGURES largely in the winter issue of *American Literature*. The lead article by William T. Stafford describes his friendship of more than thirty years with that amazing triumvirate, Henry James, Senior, and his more famous

sons, Henry, Jr., and William. All three conducted extensive correspondence and lengthy conversation with the sage of Concord, and these have been duly explored by Mr. Stafford. To James père, the theologian, Emerson was "a divine manifestation"; to Henry, the novelist, he was a moral philosopher; to William, the philosopher, he was a supreme artist—but to all three, collectively and individually, Emerson also represented the whole man. That Emerson as a public lecturer, however, was not always received with Jamesian reverence is disclosed by C. E. Schorer in "Emerson and the Wisconsin Lyceum." Between 1854 and 1867 Emerson delivered in Wisconsin twenty-three lectures. Schorer has examined the contemporary news records, and from these it appears that public reaction to Emerson's talks ranged all the way from idolatry to extreme rancor. Nevertheless, and perhaps because of it, he played a recognizable part in the cultural life of the Wisconsin of that period. The text of five of Emerson's letters is also presented for the first time by Kenneth Walter Cameron.

NUMEROUS THEORIES ABOUT THE origins of metaphysical poetry have been advanced since the appearance of Sir Herbert Grierson's monumental edition of Donne's poems in 1912. In the winter issue of *Modern Philology* Joseph Mazzeo reviews these modern theories against the perspectives provided by the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century critics themselves. At the time of the metaphysical movement no English critics were writing for contemporary comment, so Mazzeo goes to Italian and Portuguese sources. From these he cites evidence to show that the metaphysical poets and their contemporaries possessed a view of the world founded on unusual analogy and that their habits of thought prepared them for finding and accepting the most heterogeneous analogies. Their conception of a poet was that of a person having special gifts for perceiving the "unity of dissimilars," that is, for making heterogeneous analogies. Thus, to them, a poet was one

who discovered and expressed the universal analogies binding the world together. These ideas, according to Mazzeo, were taken up by the theorists of the seventeenth century who employed them as a basis for a poetic which justified the practice of the metaphysical poets in making recondite and heterogenous analogies and in using mundane and learned images.

THE ÉCLAT WITH WHICH ERNEST Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* has been received has naturally induced fresh interest in both the man and his work. Recently, perhaps because of the novel's initial publication in a mass-circulation magazine, articles on Hemingway have appeared in very different types of periodicals. These range from "Hemingway and History," by John McCormick, in the winter *Western Review* and "No Money for the Kingfish," by Charles A. Fenton, in the *American Quarterly* to Sam Boal's "Hemingway: The Man" in *Park East*, reprinted in the *March Magazine Digest*, and another of the same title by Ellis Whitfield in *Why, The Magazine of Popular Psychology*. (See also "Technique in Hemingway," by Joseph Beaver, in the *March College English*.) Boal's article is an urbane biographical sketch. Whitfield's main concern is to explain the puzzling contrast between Hemingway's sensitivity as a creative artist and his zest for blood, gore, and death. Fenton narrows his field to the study of the prize-fight stories to show that professionalism has always been very important to Hemingway, who is a man with a high sense of craft; and McCormick reviews all Hemingway's writings to the point that his feeling for history (Hemingway is "a self-conscious social historian") and the use to which he has put the American literary tradition are reasons for seeing Hemingway first as an artist. Taken together, these last three articles provide an interesting study of the evolutionary development of Hemingway's attitude toward violence. Whitfield, in a lively but not sensational analysis of the relationship between his life and work, makes the point that the grounded for

Hemingway's preoccupation with virile pursuits was laid in his childhood when he and his father took to the woods and to hunting to escape the cultural pressures of feminine society in Oak Park and, more especially, his mother's insistence that he play the cello. (His cello-playing, however, aroused his creative abilities as well as his masculine rebellion.) In addition to hunting, another facet of the rebellion was a course in boxing lessons while he was still in high school, and subsequent experience in the ring. Fenton describes the synthesis of Hemingway's knowledge of boxing with his integrity as a literary craftsman, making the point that his participation in sports was prompted in part by his desire to be able to write of them with the intimacy of the practitioner. Thus he quotes Hemingway as saying, "One simply doesn't write from guesswork. You must find out all you can about something, then record it as honestly and minutely as possible." McCormick discusses the subject of violence on a more philosophical level. Hemingway, he says, "is not a muscular athlete who has got around to writing some readable though annoying books." He searches out violence, not for its own sake, but "because ours is a time of violence, and because in portraying violence he can show us ourselves more accurately and more artfully."

SEVERAL YEARS AGO HERMANN Hesse was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. At that time he was almost unknown in this country. Since then, several of his works have been translated into English and published either here or in Britain. In the winter *Western Review* Harvey Gross discusses Hesse's major novels and describes his place in German fiction as midway between Kafka and Mann, less "naturalistic" than Mann and with a more controlled sense of literary form than Kafka. For the general reader and for world literature students, this is a good introductory article to the fiction of Hesse. An English translation of Hesse's essay on Dostoevski will be published in the spring *Western Review*.

## New Books

**CHAUCERIAN ESSAYS.** By GORDON HALL GEROULD. Princeton University Press. Pp. 103. \$2.00.

**CHAUCER.** By RAYMOND PRESTON. Sheed & Ward. Pp. 325. \$4.50.

These two volumes differ greatly in range. Professor Gerould's six essays are directed primarily to the student of Chaucer and are concerned with the unknottling of a few specific tangles of interpretation. Professor Preston's purpose is to interpret the work of Chaucer to the modern reader, "to help him understand something which seems at first a little remote, and is at the same time too valuable to lose." Professor Gerould writes with clarity and grace on "Chaucer's Calendar of Saints," "The Social Status of the Franklin," "The Vicious Pardoner," "Some Dominant Ideas of the Wife of Bath," "The Serious Mind of Chaucer," and "The Limitations of Chaucer." The reader is enlightened. Professor Preston's more ambitious undertaking is more *ad hominem* than *ad rem*. Much of it is interesting, but much, also, is inchoate.

**SECULAR LYRICS OF THE FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES.** Oxford. Pp. 331. \$3.50.

A new volume in the "Oxford Series of Middle English Lyric Collections" containing 212 items from 114 manuscripts, with an Introduction, Notes, Glossary, and Index to First Lines.

**LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST.** Edited by RICHARD DAVID. Harvard University Press. Pp. 196. \$3.50.

**KING LEAR.** Edited by KENNETH MUIR. Harvard University Press. Pp. 256. \$4.25.

The "Arden" edition of Shakespeare's plays, founded over fifty years ago, is now being reissued under the general editorship of Una Ellis-Fermor. These are two new volumes in the new "Arden" edition. The texts of both have been entirely revised in the light of modern criticism and research, and the new introductions include extended literary discussion. The notes and aids

to advanced study are elaborate. The print is clear and on good paper.

**MARLOWE AND SHAKESPEARE.** By H. ROHRMAN. Van Loghuen Slaterus/Arnheim. Pp. 109.

A thematic exposition of five plays: *Tamburlaine*, *Faustus*, *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Macbeth*, well written in English in a suggestive rather than conclusive manner, and very interesting.

**SHAKESPEARE AND ELIZABETHAN POETRY.** By M. C. BRADBROOK. Oxford. Pp. 279.

A study of Shakespeare's plays and poems and their relation to the poetry and life of his age. Miss Bradbrook terms it an "interim report"; but, although she has surveyed a vast field which has not yet been fully explored, teachers and students of Shakespeare will find it both illuminating and helpful. They will also find it enjoyable because her approach is humane rather than pedagogic. There is a fascinating chapter on the daily language of the Elizabethans, showing Shakespeare's growth in usage from the early patterns to his contributions to the language of his day. Other chapters discuss the works of Sidney, Spenser, Marlowe, and Chapman within the traditions in which each worked; the Elizabethan concepts of love, honor, duty, and wit and the use which Shakespeare made of these. In a final section several of the comedies and histories are considered, with special emphasis on certain characters—Shylock, Mercutio, Malvolio, Rosalind, Falstaff, Hall, and Beatrice and Benedick.

**ELIZABETHAN POETRY.** By HALLETT SMITH. Harvard University Press. Pp. 355. \$5.00.

The author examines Elizabethan nondramatic poetry to study the nature of the creative process in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. It was a season in literary history when poetry was not just the private experience and biography of the poet but a response of the poet to certain vigorous stimuli indigenous to the time. What Smith is trying to explain is the

"Elizabethan-ness" of Elizabethan poetry. A chapter each is devoted to pastoral poetry, Ovidian poetry, the sonnets, satire, poetry for music, and heroic poetry.

**SHAKESPEARE AND CATHOLICISM.** By H. MUTSCHMANN and K. WENTERSDORF. Sheed & Ward. Pp. 446. \$6.00.

An extensive study of Shakespeare's religious sympathies, in which both external historical evidence of the situation of Catholics in Shakespeare's England and internal evidence from the plays are used to prove what in the author's opinion is a logical conclusion, that Shakespeare was a Roman Catholic. A major section—and the most interesting one—examines the Catholic dogmas, ideas, and customs found expressed in the plays and also discusses his portrayal of the Catholic clergy. Another section deals similarly with his treatment of Protestantism. Readers will find much to interest them, although they may not be convinced that Shakespeare was a Catholic.

**THE YEAR'S WORK IN ENGLISH STUDIES,** Vol. XXXI: 1950. Edited for the English Association by FREDERICK S. BOAS. Oxford. Pp. 288. \$3.00.

The most recent volume of the English Association's annual surveys. There are several changes in the roster of contributors, but the general arrangement remains about the same: works on general critical ideas and literary forms; literary histories; biographical and critical essays; American studies; translations of significance for literary students; anthologies; social aspects of literature and journalism; miscellaneous works.

**MORE'S "UTOPIA."** By J. H. HEXTER. Princeton University Press. Pp. 171. \$3.00.

This book is subtitled *The Biography of an Idea*, and, as such, it is an extraordinarily interesting account of what Hexter thinks went on in More's mind as the idea of Utopia grew upon him. He points out that More's two major preoccupations in the *Utopia* are the question of property and the question of counsel or public service, and then goes on to analyze and interpret More's idea of the good society and of the obligations of the intellectual living within it. Its practical relevance to contemporary problems does not have to be underlined!

**THE POETICAL WORKS OF JOHN MILTON,** Vol. I: *PARADISE LOST*. Edited by HELEN DARBISHIRE. Oxford. Pp. 326.

The editor states in her Preface that a prolonged study of Milton's manuscripts and printed texts has taught her that "he used spelling and punctuation with deliberate care for his own ends." To Milton, "every sound and syllable counted, every pause or silence between sounds." Miss Darbishire has therefore revised the spelling and punctuation throughout on principles she believes to have been Milton's and for which she supplies an explanatory introduction. Her aim has been to offer a text as near as possible to that which Milton himself would have given us, if he had had his sight. Textual apparatus is kept to a minimum. Well printed on good paper.

**THE OCCASIONAL VERSE OF RICHARD STEELE.** Edited by RAE BLANCHARD. Oxford. Pp. 137. \$4.25.

Steele's poems are few and are of only incidental interest and value as the "occasional" work of a well-known dramatist and essayist. They are here collected for the first time and edited with an Introduction and textual and explanatory notes.

**THE RESTORATION COMEDY OF WIT.** By THOMAS H. FUJIMURA. Princeton University Press. Pp. 232. \$4.00.

A Hawaiian scholar discusses Restoration comedy from the point of view that it is a witty presentation of the naturalistic outlook on life rather than merely "a comedy of manners." He prefers the term "a comedy of wit," and the first third of the volume is devoted to a discussion of the nature of wit and the intellectual background and aesthetics of wit comedy. The plays of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve are then analyzed in detail, and a concluding chapter underlines the author's thesis, which has been well substantiated by the evidence offered, that the Restoration plays, far from being mere comedies of manners, are realistic, fundamentally serious, and curiously modern in feeling.

**JONATHAN SWIFT AND THE ANATOMY OF SATIRE.** By JOHN M. BULLITT. Harvard University Press. Pp. 214. \$4.00.

This is a study of Swift's satiric technique; but, since his devices evolve organically out of



his materials and since his power derives from a combination of intellectual content and technical accomplishments, the author is concerned chiefly with those aspects of Swift's craftsmanship "which most intimately join with and express his intellectual attitudes and values." Will be very useful to all students of Swift, as well as practitioners of satire.

**THE LIFE AND ACTIVITIES OF SIR JOHN HAWKINS.** By PERCY A. SCHOLES. Oxford. Pp. 287. \$7.00.

Hawkins was a musician, a magistrate, and a friend of Dr. Johnson, public spirited and hard-working. But he was not amiable, and he left no particular mark upon the society of which he was a part. Thus the chief value of this well-written biography lies in its deft revisualization of eighteenth-century life. One cannot help wondering why Dr. Scholes, whose monumental biography of Dr. Charles Burney in 1948 was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize as the best biography of the year, should have bothered to spend time on Sir John.

**BEDLAM ON THE JACOBAN STAGE.** By ROBERT RANTOUL REED, JR. Harvard University Press. Pp. 190. \$3.50.

The English stage in the early seventeenth century was characterized by a kind of reckless excitement not unlike the temper of our own time, and the audience, not unlike our own, was interested in the portrayal of what we would call "neurotic" persons as well as in the completely insane. Reed examines the use of insanity as a form of Jacobean theatrical device to determine how much it affected the spirit and technique of Jacobean drama. He shows that the Jacobean were much more understanding of the psychopathic individual than the Elizabethans; discusses the various types of madness found in the plays of Fletcher, Jonson, Massinger, Dekker, Webster, etc.; and shows how, in some, the mad folk were used simply to divert the audience with their antics, while in others they were used to help create an atmosphere of terror.

**WILLIAM COWPER.** By MAURICE J. QUINLAN. University of Minnesota Press. Pp. 251. \$4.50.

A critical biography of the leading poet of the religious revival of the eighteenth century, per-

haps best known as a hymn writer ("Hark, my soul, it is the Lord" and "God moves in a mysterious way") and as the author of the very secular ride of "John Gilpin." Quinlan captures the pleasant intimacy of Cowper's own style to make a very readable, albeit scholarly, study.

**JOHNSONIAN AND OTHER ESSAYS AND REVIEWS.** By R. W. CHAPMAN. Oxford. Pp. 243. \$3.50.

Twelve essays and twelve literary reviews on a diversity of topics. Four are on Dr. Johnson; others include a discussion of such authors as Goldsmith, Chesterfield, Walpole, and Jane Austen and such topics as landscape gardening, lexicography, textual criticism, the lamented society for Pure English.

**WORDSWORTH AND THE LITERATURE OF TRAVEL.** By CHARLES NORTON COE. Bookman Associates. Pp. 122. \$3.00.

It has been the prevailing point of view that Wordsworth's poetry was not influenced by books. Coe has investigated Wordsworth's reading of travel literature to find that forty-four of his poems show evidence of his knowledge of, and his borrowings from, travel books. Coe's study is by no means another *Road to Xanadu*, but he does show that Wordsworth was not immune to book reading.

**THE ANATOMY OF ROBERT BURTON'S ENGLAND.** By WILLIAM R. MUELLER. University of California Press. Pp. 121. Paper-backed.

A doctoral study of the background which produced Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*.

**THOMAS DE QUINCEY, LITERARY CRITIC.** By JOHN E. JORDAN. University of California Press. Pp. 301. \$3.75. Paper-backed.

A study of De Quincey's method and achievement as a literary theorist and practicing critic. It also gathers together and makes available most of De Quincey's significant critical opinions.

**REHEARSALS OF DISCOMPOSURE.** By NATHAN A. SCOTT, JR. King's Crown Press. Pp. 293.

The modern writer does not feel at one with his age, as, for example, Shakespeare did with

the Elizabethans. He has a feeling of spiritual isolation, but he is not necessarily an existentialist. Rather, his statements on his estrangement are more likely to be an inquiry into the nature of man. Scott takes Franz Kafka, Ignazio Silone, D. H. Lawrence, and T. S. Eliot and examines their work in relation to this idea of alienation. He feels that these four writers are important because, as they write of their own lostness they "so universalize their individual experience as to project a fundamental and radical criticism of contemporary history." Students of contemporary and world literature will find his analyses useful and provocative.

**ANDRÉ MALRAUX AND THE TRAGIC IMAGINATION.** By W. H. FROHOCK. Stanford University Press. Pp. 175. \$4.00.

Malraux is one of the most enigmatic and controversial figures in France today, not only as a politician, but as a philosopher and as a novelist. This is the first full-length study of the man and his writings. Indispensable for students of contemporary and world literature.

**THE CRITIC'S ALCHEMY.** By RUTH Z. TEMPLE. Bookman Associates. Pp. 343. \$4.00.

A study of the introduction of French symbolism into England, with individual chapters on Matthew Arnold, Swinburne, Arthur Symonds, Sir Edmund Gosse, and George Moore. Illustrated.

**THE LITERARY CRITICISM OF "YOUNG AMERICA."** By JOHN STAFFORD. University of California Press. Pp. 154. Paper-backed. \$2.00.

A study in the relationship of politics and literature, 1837-50.

**THE CULTIVATION OF COMMUNITY LEADERS.** By WILLIAM W. BIDDLE. Harper. \$3.00.

An account of a novel attempt of a small college (Earlham in Richmond, Indiana) to cooperate with community citizens to bring about social improvement and at the same time develop community leaders (not bosses). The seminars which are the college machinery for the work are nondepartmental, although a majority of the students enrolled are social studies majors.

**PRINCE OF PLAYERS: EDWIN BOOTH.** By ELEANOR RUGGLES. Norton. \$4.50.

Miss Ruggles has given intensive study to her story, which is told simply but interestingly. Booth's great actor father, cursed with the liquor habit; the brother who killed Lincoln; and the wife who became insane added up to too much sorrow for even a great man. He never lost his belief that "there is a meaning and when the last leaf flops over, we'll know the whole lesson by heart." The poetry, idealism, and bohemianism of the nineteenth-century theater come alive in this story of a mad, talented family. Illustrated. 400 pages. March Book-of-the-Month-Club choice.

**WILLA CATHER, LIVING: A PERSONAL RECORD.** By EDITH LEWIS. Knopf. \$3.00.

The author was a warm personal friend of Willa Cather's for nearly forty-five years. They shared a New York apartment and led a beautiful life together. She writes of Miss Cather's childhood, her family, her friends, and gives us very personal glimpses of the books which Miss Cather wrote and of her love for her characters. This is indeed a beautiful and deeply personal tribute to a woman and a friend.

**WILLA CATHER: A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY.** By E. K. BROWN. Completed by LEON EDEL. Knopf. \$4.00.

Mr. Brown died before he had quite completed this biography. He left copious notes, and his friend Leon Edel completed the book. Very complete biographical study of Miss Cather's life and an excellent critique of her writings. Miss Edith Lewis (see preceding item) cooperated with both authors. An interesting introduction of some length by Mr. Brown. Quoted from Miss Cather: "The years from eight to fifteen are the formative period in a writer's life, when he unconsciously gathers basic material."

**THE DISINHERITED OF ART: WRITER AND BACKGROUND.** By SOLOMON FISHMAN. University of California Press. \$2.75.

Fishman starts with the "writer's sense of alienation from his culture," which he thinks has been prominent in American literature; discusses the general questions of nationalism, regionalism, and internationalism supposedly particularly urgent in America; and ends by discussing the status of literary art here today.

**THE SINGULAR PREFERENCE.** By PETER QUENNEL. Viking. \$3.75.

An English freelance writer here collects twenty-eight literary portraits and essays published in magazines during twenty years. The topics range from Chinese poetry and some minor Elizabethan dramatists to Kipling and H. G. Wells. Quennell is much interested in style but does not neglect content and especially authors' general moods and views of life. His opinions are quite definite, and his pronouncements forthright.

**THE SHORTER BARTLETT'S FAMILIAR QUOTATIONS.** "Perma Specials." Perma-books (575 Madison Ave., New York 22). \$0.50.

Edited from the latest edition of the standard reference work, this contains 10,000 quotations and features a new alphabetical arrangement by authors and new subject and key-word indexes.

**THE SPIRIT OF ROMANCE.** By EZRA POUND. New Directions. \$4.00.

The original version, published in 1910, has been "considerably revised." Pound discusses the transition from Latin to Romance literature, the Provençal troubadours, the medieval narrative poetry of northern France, the *Chanson de Roland*, *The Cid*, Guinizelli, Cavalcanti, Dante, Lope de Vega, and Camoens. Chiefly factual, but Pound always has critical opinions.

**THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF BOOKS.** Edited by ALFRED STEFFERUD. "Mentor Books." New American Library. Pp. 317. \$0.35. (Also Houghton Mifflin in case binding.)

A series of essays telling what books can do for their readers, which grew out of a Conference on Rural Reading, conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture in September, 1951. Some of the papers deal with the pleasures to be got from different kinds of books, some with reading for various purposes, some with how to choose books, how to read better, and how to make use of libraries.

All the papers are clearly written, without literary sophistication; some, with journalistic skill. There is nothing beyond the reading capacity of a ninth- or tenth-grade student.

The strength of this book, which led the National Council of Teachers of English to join

in its sponsorship, is that it has something of importance for almost every serious person anywhere. The authors are book addicts, but each knows at least one social group rather well, and they have written with specific audiences in mind. Teachers will find it useful to lend to adults who are potential but now only slight users of books, and also to consult for approaches to special cases in or out of school and even for suggestion of titles to recommend. The school library should have it (casebound, perhaps), and the teacher may be able to afford a few copies to give away at critical moments.

W. W. H.

**UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE STYLE MANUAL.** Superintendent of Documents, United States Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D.C. Pp. 492. \$2.25. Abridged edition (pp. 229), \$1.00 (paper bound).

This manual is one of the three or four chief authorities on the "mechanics" of printed English. It is neither ultraliberal nor really conservative. For instance, it adopts the spellings *catalog* and *theater* but insists upon a comma between the members of full compound sentences. Again, it compromises by placing a comma between an introductory modifying phrase and the subject *modified* (italics ours). It begins the "Punctuation" chapter with a statement that punctuation is to clarify meaning and that any punctuation which does not do that should be omitted. There are many practical details, such as listing all the *-ible* words and saying all others are spelled *-able*.

**A SURVEY OF VERB FORMS IN THE EASTERN UNITED STATES.** By E. BAGBY ATWOOD. University of Michigan Press. Pp. 53 (folio) plus 31 plates. \$2.50.

This study of the materials collected for the *Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada* finds some variant usages characteristic of fairly clearly defined regions and other variants irregularly distributed. Throughout it assumes that these nonstandard past tenses and past participles are older forms surviving. It finds the pasts *clim*, *clum*, *done* (drug), *et*, *knowed*, *run*, *rung*, *seen*, *taken*, and *holp* common among illiterates and considerably used by more educated persons but not current among the cul-

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tured. But *laid* (did lie) *he don't care*, *knit*, *here's your clothes*, and *have drank* used by about half the cultured. *Pled*, *fit*, *sweat*, *shrunk*, *dove*, and *dreamt* are used by the cultured in the areas where they are used by the illiterates. Those who are curious about usage will find here hours of diversion—and enlightenment.

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